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Laramie Dean Carlsen
The University of Montana

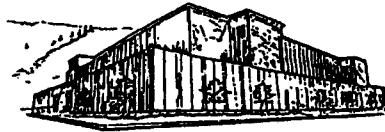
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OUT UNDER THE BIG BLUE SKY:
CREATING A NEW THEATRICAL WORK BY EXPANDING ON THE
DOCUMENTARY THEATRE FORM

by

Laramie Dean Carlsen

B.F.A The University of Montana, 2002

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

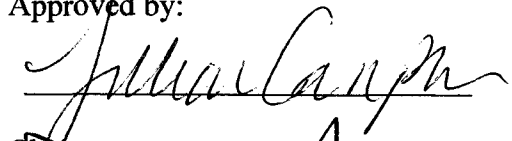
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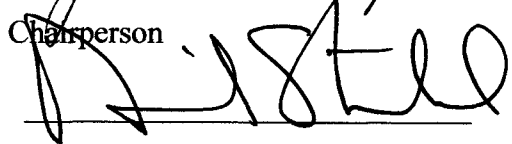
The University of Montana

May 2005

Approved by:



Chairperson



Dean, Graduate School

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Theatre

Out Under the Big Blue Sky: Creating A New Theatrical Work by Expanding on the Documentary Theatre Form

Chairperson: Jillian Campana 

This paper details the creation of a play the author wrote utilizing pre-existing forms of documentary-style theatre. It charts the progress the author made while researching documentary theatre by reading plays in this style, as well as numerous other sources pertaining to its format and history. This paper will also explore the process the author developed while trying to bridge the gap between documentary theatre and purely fictional playwriting. It will also include the methodology the author used to collect the stories of sixteen Montanans who identify as “queer” in order to present their stories in the form of a performed play.

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When I was presented with the idea of writing a play for my thesis, I realized what a wonderful opportunity this was to pursue an idea that had intrigued me since I had worked on *The Laramie Project*: using the form of documentary theatre to write a play. What knowledge I had about the form came from *The Laramie Project*; I knew that the Tectonic Theater Project and its director, Moises Kaufman, had traveled to Laramie, Wyoming, in the wake of the Matthew Shepherd murder, had interviewed two hundred citizens of Laramie, and transformed those interviews into a play (Kaufman 10). While working on *The Laramie Project* I became excited about the prospect of using the language and the stories of actual people to tell a larger story, but I was unsure, at that point, what techniques and methods of research I would eventually employ. Ultimately I wanted to write a play about the gay experience as a cultural phenomenon, and I wanted to use the voices of the people to tell it.

This paper, then, seeks to recount the process I developed while writing a play that has its basis in documentary theatre, but at the same time strives to combine that form with a more traditional, fictitious kind in order to create a new play.

The focus on the play would be the stories my subjects related to me. The potential existed to collect the stories of hundreds of gay men and women (“queer” is a label that many twenty-first century people of an “alternate” sexuality are adopting to avoid pigeon-holing themselves into an identity that may shift and change depending on their experiences; henceforth in this paper I will refer to the gay community as a whole as “queer”). Immediately basic questions arose: should I include transgendered people in my research? What about bisexuals? Or men or women who had experienced same-sex encounters but did not consider themselves “homosexual”, or even “bisexual”? I

began to consider the different ways I would collect their stories: personal interviews with Missoulians who identified as queer, interviews by phone for people out of town, or using a chat feature on Gay.com, a website which allows one to connect with other queer people in almost every country in the world. At this point in my process, I was still feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information that rested, potentially, at my fingertips.

I knew that I wanted a central character to form the “spine” of the play that the rest of the stories would fall around. I was intrigued by the story of Chad Allen, a former teen idol-actor in the mid to late 1980’s, most famous for his role on *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*, who had been outed by the tabloids in 1995 (Vilanch 43). Since then Allen has used his “notoriety” to boost gay causes such as the Trevor Project, which sponsors a toll-free, round-the-clock suicide hotline for queer teens, and has acted as a performer-producer to further gay-themed productions such as Terrence McNally’s highly controversial *Corpus Christi*, a play depicting Jesus Christ as a homosexual in modern-day Texas (Vary 41). I wanted to adapt Allen’s story into a fictional account of an outed actor who comes back to his small town to deal with his family and friends’ outrage; at the same time I would incorporate the story of a fictitious young gay man in that same town who is considering suicide. The stories from the interviews I planned to gather would act as a guide for both characters, drawing them together, with the possibility of the actor helping (or, perhaps, failing) to save the young man’s life.

As I rolled these ideas around in my head for nearly a year, I finally accepted that the scale of this project was too grand. I abandoned the idea of adapting Chad Allen’s story in favor of focusing on a smaller area of queer life. While I was home

visiting my parents in rural Eastern Montana in the summer of 2004, I began to think about the gay experience in Montana, and how there are a lot of cultural myths in the United States concerning Montana as a whole. (Eventually I would explore a few of these myths via the characters in the finished version of the play; the notion that Montanans don't have electricity, for example, or that we use outhouses in lieu of actual bathrooms.) Would these questions and mistaken perceptions hold true for Montana's queer citizenry as well? And how does this community view the world at large?

I had worked during that same summer with Professor Jillian Campana on *The Puzzle Club*, a documentary play she was writing for her dissertation. The play focused on thirteen citizens of Missoula, Montana, who partook in a therapy group for survivors of brain injuries called the Puzzle Club. Dr. Campana constructed her play from the interviews of these thirteen subjects, in a manner similar to that used by the Tectonic Theater Project. A smaller canvas of characters seemed ideal for the tighter focus I now had in mind for my play, rather than the grander scale employed in *The Laramie Project*. I decided that the subject of my play would now focus exclusively on under twenty people who identified as gay/lesbian/bisexual and who had grown up in Montana.

At the same time, I still wanted to create a fictitious main character and build the story of the play around him. His coming out process would provide the spine of the play since "the coming-out process is one of self-discovery, and each person has his or her own personal timetable, journey, and destination (Signorile xi)." This seemed an ideal way to create an original theatrical work using source material (newspaper articles, coming out letters, personal journals, in addition to the interviews I planned to conduct),

while, at the same time, providing the audience with a protagonist who's story — and journey — they could follow and identify.

At first I decided to interview only people who had grown up in Montana. I comprised a list of questions posed to my subjects in tape-recorded interview sessions that would detail their experience. Several of the subjects were friends of mine that I had met from the Lambda Alliance (the gay and lesbian group at the University of Montana campus) while I myself was still in college; other subjects I found while attending Lambda meetings the fall of 2004. Still other subjects were referred to me. The questions they answered focused mainly on their lives growing up, how their queer identification impacted or did not impact specific areas of their lives, and how living in Montana compared to other places or other queer communities with which they had experience. What I learned after the second interview, however, affected the rest of my process, and also changed the focus, direction, and shape the play ultimately took.

Particularly with the last set of questions (which all began with “How has growing up in Montana affected ...”), it became apparent that the subject who had grown up exclusively in Montana had nothing with which to compare their experiences. I regrouped my efforts and began to expand my search. Suddenly, by including into my subject pool queers who grew up outside of Montana but now chose to make their homes here, I found I had significantly richer source material. Not only could these “outside” subjects compare their own experiences to their new lives in Montana, but I could compare them to the interviews and stories I had gleaned from native Montanans. Sometimes the perceptions from both groups — “In Montana” vs. “Out of Montana” — were vastly different, and other times their experiences paralleled each other. For

instance: Paige, who grew up in Mississippi, told a story regarding her fundamentally religious parents that was similar to Dani's story, who grew up outside of the small town of Potomac, Montana. As I began to transcribe the interviews, it became clear to me from these connections and overlapping similarities that a narrative was beginning to take shape.

While I was interviewing my research subjects, I was at the same time reading articles (mostly from *The Advocate*, a bi-weekly magazine devoted to bringing information to the queer community) and books that documented coming out stories in order to expose myself to the queer experience on a broader, global level, in order to draw from if necessary when I began to write the play. I did not interview parents of queer Montanans, but at the same time didn't want to avoid that aspect of my subjects' stories, and so these outside sources became vital, particularly during what would become Moment 6 of the play, "How Can You Know?", and Moment 7, "Mom". I drew inspiration from a number of stories and instances recounted in these books. Barbara, the mother of a gay son, admits, "You realize that you have these expectations for your children that you didn't know you had (Owens 46)." This would become one of the major themes in that moment. One particularly amusing and disturbing incident became fodder for one of my characters: "Travis came out to his mother as a high school junior, but feared telling his stepfather, 'who doesn't drink homogenized milk because it says "homo" on the label' (Owens 47)."

I also drew material from the newspapers. *The Kaimin*, the student-written newspaper for the University of Montana, provided me with an account of an attack on a frat house by a "rival" fraternity that employed gay epithets and slurs, and how the

Lambda Alliance stepped in to handle the situation (Inbody 2003). It dovetailed neatly with stories told by one of my subjects, Tim, because he was actually a member of the guilty fraternity at that time, and told me his side of the story. To also craft the play, I drew from the February 8, 2003 issue of *The Missoulian*, which described the arson and attempted murder of a University professor in the psychology department, her partner, and their adopted son. Finally, *The Billings Gazette*, in the heat of the 2004 Presidential election and the furor surrounding the debate over gay marriage and the stance Montanans would take on them, published several letters on the subject. I chose two, from people on opposing sides of the debate, but, fascinatingly, both advocating the same idea: gays should leave Montana. I used the text of the letters in their entirety in the play, and changed only the last names and locations of the letter writers.

As I researched the content I had planned for the play, I also researched the form. Documentary theatre, as it has come to be known today, is a form of theatre wildly mutating and almost in constant flux, which is part of what made it so appealing to me. It seems to resist definition; this I gleaned after reading documentary plays, numerous articles about documentary plays, and the only available critical analysis of the form that exists, *Documentary Theatre In the United States: An Historical Survey and Analysis of Its Content, Form, and Stagecraft*, by Gary Fisher Dawson.

Documentary theatre is commonly accepted to have begun with *Danton's Death* (1835), by German playwright Georg Buchner. The play is a tragedy that uses verbatim documentation from key agents of the French revolution while they fled to Strasbourg to avoid arrest (Dawson 2). "Traditional" documentary theatre seeks to recreate the past using oral histories; it has often been referred to as "theatre of testimony". Many of

these plays focus on some specific historical event that has current social or political impact. *The Laramie Project* does this, as does the work of actress/playwright Anna Deveare-Smith.

I read Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, which covered the Los Angeles riots following the 1992 not-guilty verdict that freed the police officers who had beaten African American Rodney King. "Three days of burning, looting, and killing scarred Los Angeles and captured the attention of the world (Smith, xviii)." It was this attention and scarring, as well as her own racial identity, that compelled Smith to begin this project. She interviewed, as did the Tectonic Theater Project, over two hundred people to "search for the character of Los Angeles in the wake of the initial Rodney King verdict (Smith xvii)". More importantly, her work was concerned with the stories of these people, captured verbatim and rewritten, because "in order to have real unity, all voices would have to first be heard or at least represented (Smith xxv)."

As Smith states, documentary theatre strives to bridge a gap between communities, between worlds, by giving a voice to the voiceless. That above all other aspects of the form influenced me: providing a means of expression to a disenfranchised group of people, themselves a small part of a larger community overlooked. I was determined to give the gays and lesbians of Montana a chance to tell their stories in a forum that would expand beyond our dialogue (the subject and I), and into a broader setting (the world theatre community), with the trappings of a documentary-style play as that vehicle.

But I was concerned. I was planning to fictionalize certain elements; after all, my planned protagonist was going to be semi-autobiographical, but also composed of

any other elements from readings or interviews that I saw fit to include. In some instances, such as in the work of Emily Mann, documentary theatre strives (but does not always succeed) to remain objective, to allow the stories to speak for themselves; the audience then becomes responsible for interpreting, making its own meaning, or seeking out whatever politics exist, or do not. What I was planning to do began to seem highly heretical to me: to use the documentary form by collecting the stories of these people I myself had a vested interest in because of my own queer identity, and then potentially abandoning the form by hammering those stories into a shape that I determined. No objectivity. How could I remain objective, I asked myself, if I included my own story among the others (which, by this point, was beginning to seem inevitable)? No immediate answer to that question presented itself, and it continued to plague me during the entire research and interview process. Thus I decided to continue the interviews, continue the research, and I would “just” see what happened when it finally came time to begin composing the play.

I finished transcribing the sixteenth interview in late December of 2004. At that point I tried a series of exercises inspired by the work of Augusto Boal from his book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. I arranged for as many of the interview subjects and their theatrical counterparts as possible to be present in one of the meeting rooms in the University Center, where I would film whatever interactions occurred. I wanted to provide the subjects with one more opportunity to convey their stories, this time by acting them out or watching them performed using Boal’s Image Theatre techniques. According to Boal’s theory, images don’t replace the words we use, but can’t exactly be translated into words either. Images are a language in themselves. “Dealing with

images we should not try to ‘understand’ the meaning of each image, to apprehend its precise meaning, but to *feel* those images, to let our memories and imaginations wander: *the meaning of an image is the image itself* (Boal 175).” Working with these Image Theatre techniques, I hypothesized, would provide an excellent means of freeing my subjects’ imaginations and creativity, more of a chance than they had been given in the interview sessions, and would perhaps allow me an opportunity to catch a deeper glimpse into their stories that would eventually inform the play when I began writing.

We began the session by introducing the subjects to their counterparts, most of whom had never met before. I explained that we would all begin by using our bodies to form images of “oppression”. The actors in the circle immediately fell into a myriad of common poses: hands over faces, bodies hunched over, silent screams. The subjects were uncomfortable and unsure, and were slow to participate, if they participated at all. It quickly became evident that we would all benefit more from this exercise if the subjects acted as sculptors, and used the actors as their clay. We began in small groups to sculpt each subject’s individual images using the actors to convey “a time you felt afraid”, “how it was to come out to your family (parents, brothers, sisters, cousins),” “the first time you fell in love”, and “what it means to live in Montana”. The subjects then presented their images to the entire group and discussed their meaning.

Next, the entire group of actors was at the disposal of the subjects; by this point the subjects were eager to participate, and began to sculpt the actors into provocative and amusing images connoting the freedom to marry, job discrimination, family reaction to coming out, high school, the gay community in Montana, and “what your ideal life would be”. There was a strong element of fantasy present in these sculptures, while the

images inherent in them tended to be more specific as they were idealized.

We concluded the experience by sitting in a circle and discussing what the subjects felt Montana held for them. Two of the actors read the dual letters from *The Billings Gazette* that would eventually find their way into the play, and we discussed both subject and actors' feelings on the role of the queer citizen of Montana in this state and the world today.

This experiment was successful in a two-fold manner. Not only did the subjects' work provide me with specific, detailed images to translate onto the page and, later, the stage (Kris' coming out to his family at Christmas; Dani and Tamiko's wedding), it also gave me a deeper insight into their individual characters, and showed me how both the subjects and the actors worked together, forming, in an hour's time, a small community. It lent the subjects more of a sense of ownership over their stories and the play as well when they began to see their stories "acted out". It also connected the actors to their subject/character, that they might begin to observe them and build each "character's" specific movement and word vocabulary into their own bodies, as well as giving them a sense of the importance inherent in each of those experiences: the stories.

Meanwhile, I continued to read, be inspired by, and draw from other examples of documentary theatre. I re-read *The Laramie Project*, and was impressed all over again by its broad canvas of characters, but also by how it employed its comparatively small company of actors to play a multitude of roles, as well as act as running and set crew. "The desire is to suggest, not recreate. Along the same lines, this play should be an actor-driven event. Costume changes, set changes, and anything else that happens on stage should be done by the company of actors (Kaufman 19)." I wanted the audience

to be aware that they were watching a play, a translation of reality into a narrative framework, and make no attempt to conceal the fact that this event is eminently theatrical. Let them see the strings and the business, I decided, and let them see the actors “backstage”, which would become the house itself. Costume changes, scenery changes, actors transforming before their eyes, talking to them, mingling with them before the play or sitting beside them in a seat — I wanted to thin the fourth wall enough that the audience becomes a part of the story, as much involved and engaged by these stories as is Jeremy, the protagonist of the play.

Documentary theatre, according to Dawson, “is not character driven in the usual sense. Missing are the Aristotelian constituencies, such as plot, ‘the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of tragedy’, and character, which ‘holds the second place,’ guiding the play’s forward movement (Dawson xii).” I disagreed with this notion, and continued to find myself questioning the form. I found that the above sentiment applied particularly to Emily Mann’s *Execution of Justice*, which covered the slaying of San Francisco mayor George Moscone and Supervisor and openly homosexual Harvey Milk by fellow Supervisor Dan White. Mann’s play is comprised of interviews and court testimonies. Because Mann is a self-defined “purist”, she feels that “it’s my job to conduct an interview well enough that, through editing and boiling down, I will get all the poetry of that person’s speech. I will get what they want to say. I’m very careful about not changing what they want to say. That is, I don’t bend a person’s testimony to my personal needs (Mann, “In Conversation”, 3).” That was a particularly eye-opening statement to me. What did that mean exactly, “boiling down”? What was “edited”? If Mann herself selected what was represented and what was not, then how could she

avoid “bending the testimony” to suit her own needs? The very act of selecting a certain “event” or set of people to write about — the choosing of the selection — indicated to me that there was automatically a personal bias.

And furthermore, would I be betraying my subjects if I made even the slightest change to their “testimony”? Parts of my own personal stories had found their way into certain characters (particularly that of James, a character I developed out of the interview with Danny). Was this becoming metafiction, or “nonfiction fiction” (Dawson, 6)? It was obvious that, in addition to sharing the stories of my subjects, I was using this play as a vehicle for some sort of catharsis for myself: “In some [autobiographical] texts the type of performance is ritual in nature — a reiterative therapeutic act, before an audience, meant to aid the writer in enacting a public performance of the marginalized self as a way of reintegrating that self into its familial/communal origins (Matthews 351).” Using this play, in part, as a vehicle for pieces of my story in addition to the others to become publicly re-enacted in a ritualistic sense had already occurred. I had definitely crossed the line of objectivity.

“Documentary theatre is a difficult art that suits playwright Tony Kushner’s idea of a form not always artistically successful, because it makes penetrating demands on its audience. Difficult art demands, as Kushner points out: ‘thinking, piecing together, searching, interpreting, understanding’ (Dawson xii).” I wasn’t shy about the idea of creating “difficult” art, but did I want to run the risk of potentially losing my audience because they were bored, or simply disengaged? Or would using those individual biographies, those testimonies, to wrap around a semi-fictional frame not prove “difficult” enough? I became worried that what I was doing actually wasn’t

“documentary theatre” at all. I felt, obscurely, that I was “cheating”.

Documentary plays are usually centered around an event, such as the tragedies in Laramie, Wyoming, and in Los Angeles in 1992. I had no “event” in mind. What I had instead were a hundred plus transcribed pages of fascinating stories, glimpses into my subjects’ lives. Ultimately I decided that the best way to serve the subjects and their stories would be to weave them into a “traditional” play, a story-structure with an arc. There would be a hero-protagonist, a boy named Jeremy who begins the play just before his high school graduation. The audience would follow Jeremy throughout his coming out — to friends, classmates, parents — as well as his first fumbling attempts at real love. Danny, one of my interview subjects, had provided me within his “testimony” a powerful story that felt accessible and familiar, and I thought that the audience would be able to easily relate to his voice. I made “Jeremy” a composite of Danny’s experiences and a few of my own, since, like “Jeremy”, I had grown up queer in rural Montana. The rest of the subjects would become characters who, in sharing their own stories with Jeremy and the audience, would guide him along a more familiar theatrical journey, a quest, to provoke and inspire growth in his character. In order to achieve this effect I finally made the conscious decision to alter the stories if necessary so that, in their final form within the play, they were not always strictly verbatim. Eve Ensler, in her groundbreaking play *The Vagina Monologues*, allowed me to feel more comfortable with this decision: “Some of these monologues are close to verbatim interviews, some are composite interviews, and with some I just began with the seed of an interview and had a good time (Ensler 7).” This was an immensely liberating notion. I felt I could preserve the integrity of each individual story while, at the same time, allow it to inform

the over-arching story as a whole. Thus, each actor (with the exception of the actor playing Jeremy) would be assigned one main character, one of the original interview subjects, and would otherwise act as a chorus to play other characters in each moment of the play as needed.

Staging would be simple, as previously noted. I was inspired by Terrence McNally's *Corpus Christi*, which employs a bare raked stage. The actors are visible at all times, and are observing if they are not actively participating in a moment. An entrance can involve stepping onto the stage, and an exit is simply returning to sit. I adopted this methodology, primarily because the scenes in my play change quickly depending on the story and who's performing it, but also because I wanted the audience to focus on the characters and the stories they were relating. Simple chairs or blocks would suffice, with props at hand, either on the stage or beside it. This sort of minimalism had also proven effective in the staging of the Federal Theatre Project's Living Newspaper productions in America in the 1930's: "Some plays did use some minimal, symbolic scenery — such single items as a garbage can or a rusty tap to suggest location (Casson 112)."

The moments that I felt worked particularly well in such ensemble-driven, documentary-based pieces as *The Laramie Project* were those that involved actual interactions between characters on stage, as opposed to the strict monologue delivery form of Smith's *Twilight*. At the same time, I wanted to preserve, to some degree, the verbatim, or as close to verbatim as possible, moments of monologue derived from the interviews. Some moments, such as Moment 4, "Dani and Paige", involve characters speaking directly and totally to the audience. Other moments, such as Moment 2,

“Outing”, concern a character (in this case that of Bryce), who speak, for the majority of the moment, directly to the audience, and then find that their story is being acted out by the chorus before them and the audience. This is an approach used in traditional, fictitious “memory plays”, such as Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie*, or Warren Leight’s *Side Man*. The audience is not excluded in this manner and feels, as Jeremy does, that they are privy to these characters, allowed inside their lives, their worlds, and can ride this journey out to its conclusion with the rest of the characters.

I completed the play with the final moment, “Big Sky Country”. By that point I followed Jeremy through coming out to his friends, his parents, and his dealing with a boyfriend for the first time, as well as the heartache and catharsis that results from the destruction of that initial relationship. By this final moment each of the characters has come to a decision or discovery of a solution to a problem each has grappled with over the course of the play. For Jeremy, it isn’t only his burgeoning and always confusing sexuality, but his decision to abandon the home and state he has known all his life, the place where his identity was forged. “Where do we go from here?” is the theme of this final moment, and it is echoed by the rest of the characters. “I will definitely move back to Montana,” says Susan. “Because it’s my home. I just don’t know when.” For some of the characters who’s interviews didn’t quite lend themselves to the theme of this final moment, I comprised a series of lines of dialogue that I felt were in keeping with each specific character as it had developed over the course of the play. These lines were adapted from many of the self-help books and magazine articles I had read while researching, primarily *Coming Out: An Act of Love*, *Outing Yourself*, *The Advocate*, and *Queer Kids*. And yet I also wanted these statements to relate back to Montana. “We are

everywhere,” I wrote for Bryce. “Even in Montana. Even here. I just want you to know that.”

Jeremy’s final speech to the audience conveys the message I wanted to leave with them, not to wrap things up neatly, because life, as we see in documentary films and drama, is rarely if ever wrapped up at all, and never neatly. “We change the world,” Jeremy tells us, because not only did I want to leave the audience with a sense of dislocation (since the future is so unsure), but also with a feeling of hope, that things have the possibility of getting better. “I am so proud of us,” he continues. “Terrified, a little bit, but proud,” and it is that pride that is so essential to the continuing growth and acceptance of the queer community, not only in Montana, not only in the United States, but in the world. And, last but not least, I wanted to illuminate this idea of the claiming and acceptance of identity when Jeremy says, speaking for himself and the rest of the characters, “I wondered how I would survive here. Now I wonder how I’ll survive anywhere else. But I can. I know I can. Because I want to be in the world. Because I am me.” The last image the audience sees is a young gay man, a realistic, positive role model, his voice primarily comprised from the actual words of actual gay men and women, as he faces the future, uncertain ... but proud. And then he fades into the darkness.

I titled the play after a line that belonged to the “real” Ross: “In Montana we have this sense of being out on the open plain, out under the big sky, out where it’s still sort of unconquered, I guess ... Something has happened everywhere. And here, you go out into the woods, and people haven’t done as much. You might be standing in a spot no one has ever been before.” Those words resonated with me during Ross’ initial

interview in September of 2004, and again when I transcribed it in December, and again when I wrote it as the last of the character speeches before Jeremy's concluding monologue. It perfectly encapsulated the experience of every character in the play, working and living and loving under the big sky that Montana is famous for. And so the play became *Out Under the Big Blue Sky*.

Since completing the first draft there has been one reading of the play with the entire cast, and it has become apparent to me that *Out Under the Big Blue Sky* is still a work in progress. At least five of the primary characters — David, Susan, Kyle, Devon, and Julie — have smaller arcs, and cause less of an impact than a character like Brooke, who became a constant counselor-mother figure throughout Jeremy's journey. David and Susan both presented me with the answers to my survey in email, and David's answers in particular were sparse. Both present valid points that I think add something to the story (Susan's lines about being out in the workplace, for example), but both characters need to be connected to Jeremy in a more obvious way. Most of the work that lies ahead for me will involve finding more about their stories rather than their opinions, because the stories that came through in the person-to-person interviews I conducted fit more into the framework of the story, i.e. using the cast to perform these stories rather than simply having them be related in monologue-form. As of this writing, and as we began rehearsals for the performance of the play, the actress scheduled to play "Julie" became unavailable two hours before our first rehearsal. Without time to find a new actress who could commit to a two and a half week rehearsal process before a full performance, I decided instead to rework the script. The majority of Julie's lines in the final performance still remain, but have been parceled out to other

characters. As I realized at the outset of this project, the stories my subjects related to me were the most important and most engaging part of the play, and that actually seeing them performed instead of simply hearing about them proved more effective and more theatrical.

Because of the realistic, non-fictitious aspects of the characters in a work that is still undeniably fictional for its majority, the impact of its message to the world — “We are here, we’re not going away, these are our stories, and you will listen to them” — is that much more dramatically underscored. “These are the words of real people,” the audience will realize. “They could be sitting here right now. They could be my friends — my family!” As the work of Anna Deveare-Smith shows (and Smith-inspired writer Marc Wolf, who’s documentary, interview-based play *Another American: Asking & Telling* dealt with the military’s policy on homosexuality), there is something intriguing about the “realism” or “honesty” in the re-creation of these stories: “Neither Smith nor Wolf was a mere actor in any received sense; they were conduits for testimony that might otherwise never be heard and thus possessed a certain secondary ‘authenticity’ as witnesses of witnesses (Kalb 19).” The fact that these “true stories” have been arranged into a strong dramatic narrative allows the audience more accessibility, especially to an audience familiar with that ancient, Aristotelian story structure. Yet these audiences are always hungry for something new and exciting.

This hybrid of traditional story structure and the trappings and form of documentary theatre, itself in a mercurial state of flux, allows for the creation of a provocative, insightful look into the lives and stories of our friends, our neighbors, our families, and ourselves. That intense sense of liberation I experienced when I accepted

the fact that I could cross-pollinate these various theatrical forms allowed me to realize that there is nothing “false” about this play, and that it still allows for the elements that documentary theatre and “traditional” plays have in common: the performance of stories with the intent that the audience experiencing them will make meaning from them, however they will. The twenty-first century playwright need not feel confined, and should use as many forms, performances, plays, histories, etc. as possible to their advantage in order to refute the old adage that “there is nothing new under the sun”. The possibilities for devising new ways of creating exciting theatrical works are far from limited.

MONTANA QUESTIONS

Thank you for talking with me today. I'm going to ask you some questions about you and your sexual orientation. Is that okay? You are being audio-taped, but if you need me to turn off the tape or wish to discontinue this interview at any time, please feel free to do so.

1. How would you describe your sexuality?
 - a. What does the phrase "coming out" mean to you?
 - b. How old were you when you had your first same-sex experience?
 - c. How old were you when you came out?
 - d. What events influenced your decision or helped you come to this realization?
 - e. Were you religious?
2. How would you describe your relationship with your family growing up?
 - a. What is your relationship with them at present?
 - b.. If you haven't told your parents, what are your reasons?
 - c. If you have told your parents, what was their reaction?
3. How would you describe yourself before you came out?
 - a. What were your occupational interests growing up?
 - b. How has coming out affected your choice of career?
4. Were you out in high school?
 - a. If no — did you know anyone that was?
 - aa. How did you interact with them?
 - b. If yes — how did your peers interact with you?
 - c. Did you ever consider suicide?
 - d. Have you ever known anyone who has considered suicide because of their sexual orientation?
5. Have you ever felt discriminated against because of your sexual orientation?
 - a. If so ... in what ways?
 - b. Have you ever felt that you were in danger because of your sexual orientation?
 - bb. How did you handle the situation?
6. How has growing up in Montana affected:
 - a. where you've chosen to live?
 - b. your choice of school?
 - c. your relationship with your parents? siblings? other family?
 - d. your interests, i.e. sports, extracurricular activities, etc?
 - e. your choice of friends?
 - f. how you perceive yourself?
7. Have you ever lived anywhere outside Montana?

a. How has living outside Montana affected your perceptions of your sexual orientation?

aa. or the sexual orientations of others?

8. Do you want your real name used in the course of this play?

Those are all my questions for today. Do you have anything else you'd like to share? Are you feeling okay right now? If you feel you need to continue talking with me or someone else please let me know so that I can help you. Here are the contact phone numbers for several groups and individuals that can provide you assistance.

Thank you for your time. Remember, you can stop being a part of this study at any time.

OUT OF MONTANA

Thank you for talking with me today. I'm going to ask you some questions about you and your sexual orientation. Is that okay? You are being audio-taped, but if you need me to turn off the tape or wish to discontinue this interview at any time, please feel free to do so.

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 - e. Were you religious?

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 - a. What is your relationship with them at present?
 - b.. If you haven't told your parents, what are your reasons?
 - c. If you have told your parents, what was their reaction?

3. How would you describe yourself before you came out?
 - a. What were your occupational interests growing up?
 - b. How has coming out affected your choice of career?

4. Were you out in high school?
 - a. If no — did you know anyone that was?
 - aa. How did you interact with them?
 - b. If yes — how did your peers interact with you?
 - c. Did you ever consider suicide?
 - d. Have you ever known anyone who has considered suicide because of their sexual orientation?

5. Have you ever felt discriminated against because of your sexual orientation?
 - a. If so ... in what ways?
 - b. Have you ever felt that you were in danger because of your sexual orientation?
 - bb. How did you handle the situation?

6. What factors affected your decision to move to Montana?
 - a. Have you faced discrimination in Montana you haven't encountered in other places where you've lived?
 - b. Did Montana have a "reputation" as far as attitude towards homosexuality?
 - bb. If yes, do you feel this "reputation" was deserved?
 - bc. Do you feel this reputation has changed?
 - c. How did your family feel about your move to Montana? Your friends?
 - d. How has moving to Montana affected your interests, i.e. sports, extracurricular activities, etc?

- e. your choice of friends?
- f. how you perceive yourself?

7. Do you see a difference in the gay communities you've encountered in Montana compared to those you're familiar with?
- a. Would you recommend that gay friends who have never visited Montana ever move here?
8. Do you want your real name used in the course of this play?

Those are all my questions for today. Do you have anything else you'd like to share? Are you feeling okay right now? If you feel you need to continue talking with me or someone else please let me know so that I can help you. Here are the contact phone numbers for several groups and individuals that can provide you assistance.

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Wednesday, December 15, 2004

* Go around and introduce each other ... why are you here (what part do you play in this process?)

— if your story is being told, then tell us a little bit about your experience (**I'll start**)

— if you're an actor, tell us a little bit about yourself and your interests

**Image of the Word: Illustrating a subject using other people's bodies
SCULPTORADES!**

— Words are important

— They have weight, but they have the weight we put on them, and everyone has a different CONNOTATION for them — connotation is the feeling evoked by the word

Words and images can be complementary.

Images don't replace the words, but they can't be exactly translated into words.

Images are a language in themselves.

Theatre is a SINALETIC method ... signifier and signification are the same:
look of love, fear, preoccupation is not separable from those emotions.

EXAMPLE: Thumbs up for "okay" is symbolic; a look of sadness is sinaletic.

An image is whatever it means to you. We'll be looking at your language on stage.

1. Everyone (actors and subjects): In a circle, standing. Create a still pose to express your opinion or idea of experience.

* Form an image that suggests oppression. Hold your pose.

— Look around to see what everyone else did.

* Form an image that suggests happiness.

* Form an image of what you were (how you felt) ten years ago!

— Five years ago.

— Today, this minute.

2. In small groups: subjects, sculpt an image of:

* a time you felt afraid

* how it was to come out to your family (parents, brothers, sisters, cousins)

* first time you fell in love

* what it means to live in Montana.

3. All the actors can be sculpted by any or all of the subjects to form one large image for each theme. Images that connote:

* freedom to marry

* job discrimination

* family reaction to coming out

* high school

- * gay community in Montana
- * what your ideal life would be

4. Back in a circle (sitting): Does anyone want to share a story?

- * A time you felt oppressed.
- * What do you feel Montana holds for you? What separates it from the rest of the country? (**Anyone!**)

Out Under the Big Blue Sky

by

Laramie Dean

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This play was compiled from the interviews of sixteen Montana residents who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Some of the text is verbatim from the interviews, some is composite. Two pieces are letters that were published in *The Billings Gazette*. Other pieces and characters are fictional.

ABOUT THE TEXT

The play has been broken into eighteen scenes, or “moments”. Some of these are independent from the others; other moments blend together.

THE CAST

The play has been written for sixteen actors. One actor will play “Jeremy”. Every other actor will have one primary character they will portray; the remaining roles have been distributed to these fifteen actors.

THE SETTING

The play has been written for a bare stage. When not participating in a scene, the actors will sit in chairs or at the edge of the stage. Entrances happen when an actor stands and joins the company; exits happen when they return to a sitting position outside the action. While seated the actors will observe the moments in progress.

CHARACTERS

JEREMY — Late high school to college aged. Struggling with his sexuality.

JAMES — Late high school to college aged. Jeremy's best friend. Out in high school.

AMY — Mid-twenties. Grew up in Missoula, Montana. Works at a daycare.

JEREMY'S MOM — Mid-forties. Bright, articulate.

JEREMY'S DAD — Mid-forties. Thoughtful.

BROOKE — Early forties. High energy.

TIM — Early twenties. High energy, almost manic. Very dramatic.

KRIS — Mid-twenties. Calm, soft-spoken.

JULIE — Late teens. Shy.

DEVON — Early twenties. Very soft-spoken.

ROSS — Early twenties. Quick to anger. Sarcastic.

CAMERON — Mid-twenties. Philosophy grad student. Dry sense of humor.

KYLE — Early twenties. Exuberant and confident.

BRYCE — Late teens. Excitable. Insecure.

KARL KAUFMAN — Late thirties. Head of the Gay Pride organization in Helena.

SUSAN — Late twenties. Brisk. Wants to teach.

PAIGE — Late twenties. Pragmatic.

DANI — Early twenties. Bright. Confident. Teaches Sunday school.

TYLER — Early twenties. Sarcastic. Wants to be a politician.

SALLY — Mid-forties.

JUDY — Mid-fifties.

LES — Early forties.

JERRY — Mid-fifties.

TINA — Early twenties. Tim's ex-girlfriend, now best friend.

MIKE — Early twenties. Fraternity brother who had a secret relationship with Tim.

PETE — Late teens. Fraternity brother, Sigma Nu.

SCOTT — Late teens. Fraternity brother, Sigma Nu.

TAMIKO — Mid-twenties. African American. Dani's wife.

DEB — Late forties. The woman who marries Tamiko and Dani.

DAVID — Early forties. Teaches at Big Sky High School in Missoula.

The remaining characters references throughout the play have only one or two lines or do not speak at all, and have distributed by actor.

ACT ONE: Wild West

1. What Am I?

The stage is bare, the house lights are still up. There are ten chairs on stage, and they are scattered around randomly. There are two tables; props and costume pieces litter them; there is no order. Seven of the actors sit in chairs in the audience. Seven more lounge about at the edge of the stage or in the back of the house, perhaps in the aisles; some help people to their seats, acting as ushers. The actors playing JAMES and JEREMY are not among them. The lights go out. In the dark, we hear the voices of the company as they assemble in various places around the stage and off. Their voices whisper, like the wind. They grow and fall in volume, sometimes overlapping, sometimes muddled. They repeat.

COMPANY:

Big sky country. Open. Wide. Mountains. Cowboys. Community. Redneck. Reassuring. Small town. Scared. Isolated. Oasis. All the beauty. Miserable. Sky. Self-sufficient. Self-reliant. Rural. Private. Proud.

One last word, spoken clearly by a single member of the company:

Home.

In the darkness:

JEREMY:

Sometimes I wonder how I exist in this place.

Lights up. Jeremy is sitting, cross-legged, center stage, chin in his hands, staring wistfully up at the sky. James sits with him.

JAMES:

There's people weirder than you, Jeremy. Me, for instance. As far as freaks go, you're pretty average.

JEREMY:

I do feel like a freak. Sometimes.

JAMES:

Things are going to change. High school's almost done. Then we get to look forward to the fun emotional rollercoaster that is college.

JEREMY:

I think high school's been rollercoaster-y enough. (*Beat while he thinks.*)
James, do you ever —

JAMES:

What?

JEREMY:

Never mind.

JAMES:

No, go ahead. Do I ever what?

JEREMY:

Nothing. Really.

JAMES:

Hey, if you ever wanna ask, or whatever. Anything. You know. You can. I'm okay with it.

JEREMY:

Yeah, I know. (*beat*) Are you scared to move away?

JAMES:

Out of Montana? Big bad city of Chicago? Eh. Maybe a little bit. Not much though. Growing up in a town this small — you wouldn't think so, but it makes you stronger. If you're a freak like me. Law of the jungle. You got nothing to worry about. Missoula's still in-state.

I don't know if I really wanna leave, though. Don't look at me that way.

Montana is beautiful. Just look up there. Look at that sky. Goes on forever, doesn't it.

JEREMY:

Yeah. Forever. (*Beat*) Something is happening to me. Inside me. Do you —

He turns to look. James is gone. He looks around, confused.

AMY enters. She indicates to the audience:

AMY:

This is Jeremy. He grew up here, all his life. Some of us did too, and some of us came here later. Some of us have never left. Some of us wonder why. I never ask. I'm Amy.

Jeremy looks to Amy.

JEREMY:

I don't know what to do. I have all these thoughts, and it feels like my head is too full. Like I don't know where I'm headed, sometimes. And I'm starting to scare people. Not just myself, for once.

PAIGE becomes Jeremy's mother and DAVID becomes Jeremy's father.

MOM:

You've always been a good boy, Jeremy. We're so proud of you, honey.

DAD:

I'm sorry I couldn't make it to your show, kiddo. Your mother took pictures. She said it was real good.

MOM:

Oh, he wanted to be there, you know that. Your father's proud of you too. He just ... (*Touches his hair.*) Is everything all right, hon?

DAD:

Your mom said you've been sorta quiet. Everything okay?

MOM:

You know you can always come to us, Jeremy.

DAD:

You can tell us. Well, you know. Almost anything. We're right here, son.

Jeremy moves away from them and addresses the audience.

JEREMY:

I just wish I knew what to do. Or had people to talk to. That's the problem, you know. When you're me, and you're here, there's no one who can tell me what's going on. Or what to do. Or who I am.

I want some help. I want to know why this is happening to me.

AMY:

Feels like you're all alone, doesn't it? This is a big state. But not a lot of people. Still, you can't be the only one.

JEREMY:

But I don't know what I'm the only one of, see? This is where I grew up. Montana is what I know. All my life. I see myself as ... just this ... person from a small town in a big state with lots and lots of empty space.

When you live in a small town in a state where most people think you still ride horses to school, you feel like you're not as in tune with everything else that's going on in the world, and that you're just ... you're from this small town and it's small town life, and not anything big and exciting.

BROOKE *enters*.

BROOKE:
It's the Wild West. It's huge. It's open.

TIM *shouts from offstage*.

TIM:
It's a cultural desert!

He sits on the stage.

BROOKE:
A bit of lawlessness.

TIM:
Brooke is the personnel director at the Bookstore at the University of Montana.

BROOKE:
Small populations. No big cities. Not a lot of culture. Those are all my projections of how I think other people must view Montana.

KRIS *enters*.

KRIS:
It's a warm blanket.

AMY:
This is Kris. He was president of the Lambda Alliance at the University of Montana for four years.

KRIS:
Missoula would be like a rare spot in Montana for it being open and tolerant. It had a reputation for being liberal and being progressive.

BROOKE:
When I was in high school in speech and debate we went to a tournament in Spokane. And it was a tournament that had people from all over — California, all over the place. And I made friends with this woman from California, and we were talking, and she made a reference to an outhouse, and she started

talking about outhouses, and I was like, “What are you talking about outhouses for?” And she was like, “Well, that’s what you guys use.”

She laughs. Amy and Kris join her.

And she was serious. That’s probably where some of that projection comes from.

JEREMY:

Something’s been happening to me lately. I have these. Um. These feelings. I don’t get them. I just don’t.

AMY:

Jeremy wants to be an actor.

JULIE *enters*.

JULIE

(to Jeremy):

You know, one third of theatre people are gay. Or maybe it’s two thirds.

He laughs uncomfortably.

JEREMY:

Really? Um. That’s a lot.

JULIE:

So you’re not?

JEREMY:

Not?

JULIE:

Gay.

JEREMY:

Me? No. No. Definite no. *(more firmly)* No, I’m not.

JULIE:

Hey, whatever.

She shrugs, moves away.

Jeremy speaks to the audience.

JEREMY:

So I'm in this play with this guy, and it's fall of my senior year of high school. And I think he's ... you know. Whatever. And maybe I'm ... whatever ... too. But I don't know, I just ... I think I'm attracted to him. My friend James is in the play too. And he's also ... um ... whatever.

James enters. Jeremy turns to him.

I have these feelings. Um. For someone. I have to tell you about. And I don't get them.

JAMES:

Is it like ... do you have a crush on someone?

JEREMY:

I don't know if you'd call it a —

JAMES:

Is it a girl? Or ...

JEREMY:

Or what?

JAMES:

Jeremy. You don't have a lot of choices here.

JEREMY:

It. Might not be. A. Girl.

JAMES:

Oh. Oh my god! It's Kent! It's Kent, isn't it! You've got a big ol' crush on Kent!

JEREMY:

No. Shut up. It's not a ... a crush. *(beat)* How did you know? It was a guy, I mean. 'Cause maybe I don't know either. I don't know if I'm ...

JAMES:

Go ahead. Say it.

JEREMY:

Like that.

JAMES:

Like what?

JEREMY:
Screw you.

JAMES:
Come on. Do you want me to say it for you?

JEREMY:
I don't know if I'm ... I really don't think I am. I don't know.

JAMES:
You just have a big ol' crush on a boy.

JEREMY:
Yes. No. God, I don't know! Forget I brought it up.

JAMES:
Well you know what they say ... ninety percent of theatre people are gay.

He exits.

JEREMY:
Oh god. Is it ninety percent now?

KRIS:
I started dropping hints to my mother, like, "Ooooh, I'm in a closet. I'm gonna be coming out of the closet very soon." Or going to the grocery store and singing, "Your son will come out tomorrow ..."

ROSS *enters*.

ROSS:
There have been times when I've wanted to move to a larger city outside Montana, but I love it here too much.

KRIS:
Ross.

ROSS:
Culture. Gay culture. Art. Anything. Missoula's not bad, I mean, I wanted out of Helena and I really wanted out of Dillon, but there's some counter-culture in Missoula. But it sucks to be a raver without a rave.

AMY:
It was a shock to me. I was sitting — this is what happened — I was sitting in history class —

Kris, Devon, Ross, and Tim arrange chairs as if they're in a classroom. Brooke is the teacher. Amy sits, daydreaming.

— and I was bored out of my mind, and I was daydreaming. You know how usually when you're daydreaming you ... it's more like fantasizing, like you can control what's going on when you're thinking about things, but this was not ... this was like a dream.

SUSAN enters as "Amy's Dream Girl". She does a seductive dance. The others don't notice her. Amy perks up considerably.

And this girl — this amazing girl — she's coming to kiss me, right?

The Dream Girl beckons. Amy leaves her chair. The two dance. The Dream Girl leans in ... and then breaks away, shaking her finger in Amy's face. She dances off.

I was like "whoo!" It was kinda fun, but I was a little freaked out, so I hid it in the back of my head until I got home later. And then I thought about it some more, then I processed for a couple weeks, thinking, "Maybe I'm bi." But I didn't want to be bi.

ROSS:

I guess I'm gay. I've actually been considering becoming anti-sexual. Sex is bad and it kills people.

AMY:

I was a little bit jockish. In retrospect it made total sense to me that I was a lesbian 'cause I was a total tomboy from the time I was born, and I loved sports and I loved climbing trees and getting dirty and I played with boys all the time and what-not. And I had a lot of gay boyfriends from the time I was like ten. I was a big tomboy.

ROSS:

Confused. Miserable and lonely and confused. I didn't know what I was. I went through that bisexual phase. "I still like girls ..." Even though, in my heart of hearts, I knew that it just wasn't happening.

JEREMY:

Maybe I'm bi. Um. Bisexual.

CAMERON *enters*.

CAMERON:

I usually use "queer" because "bi" is not as popular.

ROSS:
Cameron.

CAMERON:
People don't like that word. Everytime someone who's bi dates a boy and then breaks up with him and dates a girl, the whole gay community is like, "See? I told you. That was a mistake waiting to happen."

KYLE *enters*.

KYLE:
I used to be a Republican. I used to be a fifty dollar fee-paying Republican.

KRIS:
This is Kyle.

KYLE:
I was the stereotypical small town boy. I played three sports a year, I was in boy scouts, I was in eagle scouts, um ... everyone in your class was friends. We had twenty-three kids in our class.

JEREMY:
I'm not a Republican. I know that much.

James becomes "Devon".

DEVON:
I'm not fully there yet.

CAMERON:
This is Devon. He's my roommate.

KYLE:
And my boyfriend.

Devon and Kyle take hands.

DEVON:
We were randomly put on the fifth floor of Miller Hall, 'cause we were waiting for our apartment off-campus, and we started chatting. He said, "Hi, I'm Cameron," and then he just asked me, outright asked me. You know. If I ever questioned my sexuality. And I said ... "Yeah." And then we hung out for a little bit, and then he was like, "Oh, by the way ..." 'Cause he asked me if I wanted to be roommates, and he was like, "I thought you should know that I'm gay. Or bisexual. If you want to be my roommate, that's cool. If

not, that's cool too." He was very open about it.

CAMERON:

I'm a very aggressive person.

DEVON:

I was seventeen the first time I ever ... um. We don't talk about that. It was just a one time thing. With the new kid in town. In Shelby. It was just innocent. Like foreplay. Nothing serious.

KYLE:

He's only been out for four months.

DEVON:

I started realizing, you know, after high school — hey, I like guys too. And that's not cool. That's when I started ... whoa, what's going on here? It's like this whole chain of events that led me ... that's how I got into dropping weight, 'cause when you're physically fit you're mentally aware too. Your mind is healthier.

KYLE:

Once I got to school and had new friends in Missoula, it was like, I don't care what they think anymore. These twenty-three kids are gonna be your friends from the time you're three years old 'til you graduate high school. So you really have no room. It's all laid out for you. Your friend pool is like, this big, and if you try to break out of that friend pool and be who you feel you are, you become the oddball in the corner. Nobody wants to be that. Otherwise you'd be those four kids standing in the corner that are weird. Not conforming to somebody else's style.

DEVON:

Why me? Why do I have to be like this?

JEREMY:

I don't know. I just ... don't.

2. Outing

BRYCE *enters, stands alone. He's very excited.*

BRYCE:

Oh my god, coming out!

KRIS:

Bryce. He's my roommate.

BRYCE:

That's a phrase that means a whole lot of liberation, a whole lot of ending to a lot of pain. My sexuality is fixed. Not really fluid like I've heard people say. Pretty much over to the gay side, I'd say. I remember that I was really into crocheting when I was eight years old or something. Which, in a small town in eastern Montana, probably seemed like the weirdest damn thing in the world, that I wasn't out trying to kick other kids' asses. Or playing with trucks. I was always very different than the other young guys my age anyway. I had priorities in life. Like, other people were just kinda being dumb kids, and I always — one of the things I can remember, back in the days when I was in grade school, traditionally all the guys would go play football or something, and most of the girls would have more social interaction, and I was always more of a social interaction person. I wasn't one of those "don't talk, just play the game" guys. You know? I was more for human interaction, and that just sort of put me in the category with the girls. That got me thinking about things, sorta questioning things at an early age, I would say.

So eventually I tried to be more ... um ... masculine. Just trying to be the way macho dude. And it didn't always work that well. I was desperately trying to make sure that this whole concept of them questioning my sexuality, which is the last thing I could possibly deal with at that age, would go away. It didn't, really, but I certainly tried very hard.

Here's how I finally came out. To me it seems like being gay is a big part of my life. I don't want to say it's the entirety of my life, because it certainly isn't, but it was just really straining because you don't realize how often people talk about, like, their boyfriends or girlfriends until you're trying in essence to lie about everything you're doing there, and it just shocked me how much people actually talked about it. And I was tired of it. But at the same time I was petrified of having to say "I'm gay" to anyone. I don't know what the stigma behind those certain words is, but I could not say them. That would've been absolutely the most horrible thing that could've happened to me. If I had to say them.

It was my senior year of high school and I had just gotten enough courage to start going to the gay-straight alliance at my school, and I had heard that there was this GSA summit in Helena. And I got coaxed into going to it, and I had to lie to my parents about why they were signing this form to give me permission to do these different things. I think I said I was doing something for Respect Club, which is another group I was in, and made me sound less gay. So I went up to Helena —

Everyone else forms a circle, sitting on chairs or on the ground. Bryce joins them. David becomes "Karl Kaufman". He stands.

— and I was at the summit, and we were doing introductions, and Karl Kaufman was heading it up. And keep in mind I hadn't told anybody that I was gay. I was just being the supporter. That's all I was. I hadn't even told them. And the first thing he had us do was ...

KARL:

I want everyone to go around and introduce yourselves ... and tell us your sexuality.

BRYCE:

Holy shit!

Julie gives him a strange look and shushes him.

KARL:

Here, I'll start. I'm Karl, and I'm gay.

BRYCE:

And the whole way up there I was thinking, this is gonna happen, because I always think the worst thing, thinking in the back of my mind that of course it's not really going to happen; because naming your fears, calling them out, makes them impossible sometimes. So that's not gonna happen. Right?

JULIE:

I'm Julie, and I identify as lesbian.

BRYCE:

But it happened.

KRIS:

I'm Kris, and I'm a Libra. (*Looks around*) And a big ol' homo.

BRYCE:

Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit. It was coming around to me. Dammit! What was I supposed to do? What could I do? So I ... I just ...

He leaps to his feet, and screams:

I'm Bryce, and I'm ... GAY! I'm gay! Gay gay gay!

Everyone stares at him. He stands there for a beat. Kris begins clapping; Julie stops him. After a moment, sheepish, Bryce sits down.

It was the most awkward thing in the world. I swear, the whole contingency from Big Sky High School where I went just snapped their heads over. They were really surprised. Hell, I was too. It was ... it was really awkward.

But really liberating at the same time.

3. How?

JEREMY:

But I don't know! See, that's my problem. I just ... I don't know.

BROOKE:

Who you are? Where you're going?

JEREMY:

Yeah. Those.

BROOKE:

Unless you come out of the womb all self-aware —

TIM:

And who does these days?

BROOKE:

— of course you're going to be confused. Everybody is. Way of the world, kid.

TYLER:

And look at where you're living.

BROOKE:

This is Tyler.

JEREMY:

Here?

TYLER:

Montana.

JEREMY:

Yeah. That thought crossed my mind too.

TYLER:

My friend Thomas — he came out, said he was bi, and that turned out to be a mess for him. Like, he just got tortured by everyone. They were so mean to him.

JEREMY:

What would they do?

TYLER:

Um, just like they'd shove him in lockers, throw his stuff around. Yell at him.

JEREMY:

What would they yell?

TYLER:

Faggot, fairy. Things like that. Whatever they could think to call him. And then he ended up doing a lot of drugs to deal with it. And I remember there were a couple times I'd go over to his house to hang out with him, and I'd find him outside, huffing gas for hours to the point where he just couldn't function anymore. He'd just be sitting there. Incoherent. And then, after graduation, he just kinda ... disappeared. No one's really talked to him since.

JEREMY:

Do you know where he is?

TYLER:

No. The last I heard he was living up in Pablo with his mom, but if he's with her, then he's going to be even more of a mess than he was back then, because she's a big crackhead. So.

JEREMY:

Oh god. Maybe I don't want to do this. Maybe I shouldn't even —

ROSS:

It's not all bad. I got called "fag" here and there. By some jock assholes. Occasional things. But people didn't fuck with me very much.

TYLER:

I ended up engaged to a girl by the time I was sixteen and I was ready to be with her forever. Thank god her parents decided they didn't want her to marry a Catholic.

KRIS:

I was never harassed in high school. I was never picked on for being gay. Everyone in my class knew that I never had a girlfriend, that I never really showed any interest in girls, and I remember on the desk in my math class, someone had scrawled —

Tim, Bryce, and Cameron enter with a giant banner that proclaims in bold letters: KRIS IS GAY!!! Kris stares at it for a second. They exit with the banner.

— um, yeah. That.

SUSAN:

I don't see it as a matter of pride, just a matter of not being willing to apologize to anyone for being who you are.

BRYCE:

This is Susan.

SUSAN:

Before I came out, I was just the same as I am now. The thing is, once I realized I was gay, I stayed me. I just knew me better.

BRYCE:

To me it means that you can finally be who you really are and you don't have to hide that anymore. It's probably one of the best, if not the best, experience I've ever had.

SUSAN:

I am horrified by the fact that, not only is it not a good idea, but it's dangerous to be seen holding hands with someone of the same sex anywhere in America.

BRYCE:

Once you start putting things together you eventually realize that so many things in the past were just pointing to this the whole way.

SUSAN:

And don't even get me started on those stupid "Stick Figure Man plus Stick Figure Woman equals marriage" bumper stickers!

BROOKE:

You need friends. You need gay friends. A support system before you can do anything else.

JEREMY:

I already told James. Sorta.

BROOKE:

Did you? Really?

Devon as "James" approaches.

JEREMY:
You know what? I am.

JAMES:
You are ...?

JEREMY:
You know. God, don't make me say it.

JAMES:
Can you? Do you think? Hey man, if you're not ... I mean, you don't have to —

JEREMY:
Gay. I'm. Gay. That's me. I'm gay.

They stare at each other. James begins to smile. Doesn't say anything. Opens his arms. Jeremy hugs him tight.

JAMES:
Sometimes you don't have to say a word. Sometimes you do.

4. Dani and Paige

PAIGE and DANI are center stage. They speak to the audience. Everyone else sits, listening.

PAIGE:
I just ... fell in love with a girl.

AMY
(quietly):
Paige.

DANI:
I didn't think God wanted people to be gay. When my little brother told me he was gay, I started crying.

KRIS
(quietly):
And Dani.

PAIGE:
I didn't think about it before it happened. I grew up Southern Baptist and I was in the church all the time. Jesus was realer to me than you are sitting here.

DANI:

Growing up we heard about “the homosexual lifestyle”, how it’s immoral and indecent, and it’s all revolving around sex with multiple partners at multiple times, and blah blah blah, just emphasizing the immorality of the homosexual lifestyle, and it was something I couldn’t identify with, so I thought, “I’m not gay.”

PAIGE:

I didn’t drink, I didn’t smoke.

DANI:

I felt that I could change with God’s help.

PAIGE:

Farley and I were upstairs studying our lines for dramatic interp, and just going over everything for our event on Saturday, and we weren’t even sitting next to each other, we were just sitting across the room from each other.

DANI:

I can remember, in kindergarten, having a crush on the black lady cop from “Twenty-One Jump Street”. And I remember this one episode, she had to go undercover as a prostitute or something.

PAIGE:

But my mother opened the door and Farley jumped up, and maybe she looked guilty or something because mom closed the door and went downstairs, and five or ten minutes later Dad calls for me, and says, “Paige, come down here.”

DANI:

And there was this situation where, to stay in character, she had to kiss another woman. And I remember that was a huge deal for me, because I was like, “Wow.”

PAIGE:

And Dad says, “Why is your mother crying?” And I said, “I don’t know.” So I go in to ask her, and she looks at me and she says, “You know why I’m crying.”

DANI:

I was still uncomfortable with the word “lesbian”. But I didn’t know what else to say, so I sat her down, and I said, “Mom, I just want to tell you that I am what most people would call a lesbian.” (*She grimaces.*)

PAIGE:

I had known Farley since second grade. But we actually met because the high

school newspaper had interviewed her, and she said that Indigo Girls were her favorite band, and I was like, (*excited*) “That’s MY favorite band!” And then we ended up dating for three and a half years.

DANI:

She just kinda nodded and I tried to tell her about the journey that I had gone through, struggling with my faith and trying to explain to her how I don’t think that the Bible condemns homosexuality, because I knew that was the biggest hindrance to her. You know, “It’s wrong. God says it’s wrong. It says so in the Bible.”

PAIGE:

There was a lot of manipulation on my parents’ part. Like, “We’ll take away your car.” And they did take away my car. I was actually in a play with Farley, and they wouldn’t let me drive to the play. They drove me to the play and picked me up.

DANI:

She just believed I was being deceived. By Satan.

PAIGE:

My mother had hernia surgery last week, and it’s from 1995, when she tried to jump out of bed and slap me because I smarted off to her about Farley.

DANI:

And she started crying, and I was like, “Um, let’s pray,” so we started praying that God would give us peace, because I knew what my mom was going through because I’d seen her go through it before with my little brother.

PAIGE:

I had said something like, “Well I love her, Mother, I don’t care what you say.” And I never talked to my parents that way. I never rebelled against my parents. Mom went crazy. I mean, a total breakdown.

DANI:

I had basically helped my mom raise the kids. My brothers and sister. I never really felt like ... I always knew that she was my mother, but I always felt like we were peers more than anything else. I didn’t have ultimate authority over the kids, obviously, like a parent would, but I helped her a lot.

PAIGE:

She drove around, looking for us one night, with a shotgun. Looking for us. The most gracious, kind, wonderful woman in the world. She flipped her wig.

DANI:

And she used to talk to me about, you know, problems she was having. Like a friend. More like a peer, you know?

PAIGE:

She was going to try to scare it out of us.

DANI:

She doesn't do that anymore.

PAIGE:

She denied it later and said, "It wasn't loaded." And now she just totally denies that she did it at all.

DANI:

Me and Tamiko were talking, and we want to have kids someday. We want to have a family. But it's a hard thing, and if my mom doesn't change, I don't know if I want her in our kids' lives. Not because she's a bad person, because I don't feel like she's a bad person. I think she's got some wrong ideas and attitudes, but I think that what she feels she feels genuinely. It's part of her faith. I just don't want to expose my kids to those kinds of beliefs.

PAIGE:

I love my parents. I love them so much. I felt just horrible, but I'd be damned if I was going to give up joy for them. They taught me to go against the flow my whole life, and then all of a sudden they ... I described it as: they taught me unconditional love ... until I presented the conditional.

DANI:

But in a way, it showed me a different side of God, because the side of God I was used to was the judgmental God, the hellfire and damnation guy. My journey helped me to see the love of God more, which is what the church should have been doing in the first place.

PAIGE:

The other day my mom told me, "I'm actually really glad that you're gay, because I wouldn't have gone through the personal changes that I went through." *(She laughs. It fades away quickly.)*

DANI:

Still ...

PAIGE:

Still ...

DANI and PAIGE:
It makes me a little sad.

PAIGE:
Sometimes. You know. Just a little.

5. Mom and Dad

JEREMY:
I have to tell them.

ROSS:
Some people never do.

KYLE:
I never told my dad. He died last January.

DEVON:
I'm working up to it. 'Til I become a little bit more comfortable in my skin.

ROSS:
When I was eighteen I got arrested. Again. And put in rehab. And that first night I was on this medication that made me insane, and I called my mom and dad and brother all in a row. "I'm gay, I'm gay, I'm gay."

JULIE:
My mom told me, "Women who live with men are stronger than women who live with women." (*She laughs, horrified.*) And I was like, "What?!?"

JEREMY:
What if they already know? What if I don't have to tell them at all? What if I just ... mmmm ... never bring it up?

TYLER:
My dad was out mowing the lawn. He was like, "Are you sure? Is there any possible way you're not?" And I was like, "No. I wouldn't tell you if I wasn't a hundred percent sure." And he was like, "I kinda figured you were. I was just waiting for you to say something." I made him stop mowing the lawn, and I said, "How did you know?" And he was like, "We kinda figured when you were younger and your older brothers were asking for G.I. Joes and trucks for Christmas and you wanted Barbies." And I said, "Okay. I can see that then."

CAMERON:
I had developed "Cameron's Radical Honesty Philosophy."

DEVON:

Cameron's a grad student in philosophy.

CAMERON:

And I decided that everything that went wrong in my life had to do with me lying to other people, or people lying to me or not being truthful in general. And I told my mom, "You remember that whole radical honesty philosophy that I have? There's one problem, and that is you can lie without actually lying. I told you I wasn't gay. And I'm not. But I am bi." So that's how I told her. And she ... I don't think she cried. At least not around me. But she did kinda go around and tell everybody, and it was horrible the way she went about it, because she left too many doors open. "I think that Cameron may be ... might be ... a little bit bi. Now." What do you say to that? "A little bit of counseling, the poor boy hasn't met the right girl yet, there's all kind of little things at college that help mess you up." That's kinda where it stayed. The whole family knows, but I don't know how much they know, and I don't care. Eventually they're gonna have to deal with it one way or another.

JEREMY:

I wish it would all go away.

KRIS:

It's scary.

DEVON:

You're right about that.

KRIS:

But it doesn't have to be. I went to Matthew Shepherd's funeral, and on the way back I made a decision that I needed to do this. This is really important. I decided it was going to be on Christmas day because my whole family would be together, and I wanted to tell them all at once so that they'd hear it from me.

Brooke becomes "Mom", Paige becomes "Gramma", David becomes "Grampa", Amy becomes "Aunt Lori", Bryce and Tim become "Ronnie" and "Jamie." Ronnie and Jamie are seventeen and sixteen. They are gathered around for Christmas.

I was twenty years old. I wrote a letter a few weeks before and I had copies for my mom and my grandma and my grandpa and my Aunt Lori. And I decided to read it after we opened presents so that they wouldn't take my presents away in case anything went awry.

The night before, right before we went over to my grandmother's house, I

stuck my letters in my back pocket and concealed them with my shirt so no one would see, so if I chickened out at the last minute I'd have an escape plan. But I didn't get scared. And after we opened presents ...

He addresses his family.

Hey, everyone. I, um, have one more gift for you.

He hands them all the letters. Takes a deep breath. Begins to read.

Dear Mom and everyone: I have wanted to tell you this for a very long time, but I have never had enough self-confidence until now. What I want to tell you is that I'm gay.

Gramma lets out a loud, vocalized gasp of shock.

Kris turns to the audience.

Oh, don't worry. She was just surprised. Not horrified or anything.

Back to the letter.

I r-realize (*takes a breath*) that you may be feeling hurt and shocked by my disclosure, but I want to tell you why I chose to come out to you.

The main reason for telling is because I no longer want to hide this important part of who I am from you. Because I love you, trust you, and have faith in you. I had to tell you.

I am gay. I have always been and will always be. I have always known this; however, I used to feel this was wrong; that I was in some way inferior. You may feel that homosexuality is a phase ... that it will go away. That's not going to happen. I've struggled for years to understand myself.

Since I've been in Missoula I have started to make what could be some life-long friendships. Every Monday night I have been attending Lambda Alliance meetings. I finally feel like I belong in a group of people. Lambda has given me a real life support group where I can talk amongst friends. I hope one day you can meet my friends from Lambda. They all mean a lot to me.

Please remember that I will always love you and will always be your son. I also need you to understand that I will always be gay and cannot be changed; the same way that a straight person should not, would not, and could not be turned gay. You need not be ashamed of who I am. I am Kris, a good person who you can be proud of. If God and people are going to judge me based on who I am, then I am not worried. I know that I am as important and worthy of

love, life, and freedom as anyone else.

My Love Always, Kris.

A little beat.

MOM:
Oh sweetheart -

AUNT LORIE:
Come here, you.

Mom, Grandma, and Aunt Lorie form a line to hug him. They are crying a little, but the atmosphere isn't unhappy or angry or shameful. The others stand around somewhat awkwardly ... what do we do now? Finally, after a beat:

RONNIE:
Dude, it took guts for you to do that.

JAMIE:
Hey, if you ever need anything -

RONNIE:
Yeah, like if you want someone's ass kicked.

JAMIE:
We're your guys.

They give each other high-fives, and thump Kris on the back.

KRIS:
My entire family is really, really close. Things are changing a little now that I'm getting older, and we're starting to go our separate ways, but I talk with my mom all the time.

JEREMY:
I see that. I mean, I get it, I do. Things were better after that.

KRIS:
Totally. Because, number one, I could be honest with everyone in my family about myself. And coming out allowed me to meet everyone in Lambda and become more outspoken and more in the public eye, which I enjoy. And it helped my self-esteem. Like, through the roof. Before I didn't have many friends at all. Now I have a bounty.

JEREMY:

Okay, I'm on board. I mean, I want to. I really do. You don't know - except you do. Obviously. We all know what it's like, right? Lying awake for hours, just wondering ... will they hate me? Will things be different? Better? Or god, worse? There are so many other things I'd rather be doing, you know. Dates. Video games. Like the other guys. Just screwing around and not having to think about - am I too close to him? Does he know? I watch them go off with their friends. Holding their girlfriends' hands. Kissing in the park or in the hall at school, laughing with each other and playing, and I just think ... they don't know how lucky they are. They don't. And they never will.

I can't do this.

The others only watch him wordlessly.

Can't any of you tell me what to do? Please? How the hell do I know when I'm ready for this?

Amy and Dani come forward, donning glasses and holding clipboards as they become a walking, talking pamphlet: "How to Come Out To Your Parents." They are clinical, almost emotionless.

AMY and DANI:

Questions you need to consider before coming out.

AMY:

Are you sure about your sexual orientation?

JEREMY:

Well, I thought —

DANI:

Don't raise the issue unless you're able to respond with confidence to the question.

AMY:

Confusion on your part will increase your parents' confusion and decrease their confidence in your judgment.

JULIE:

My parents totally didn't believe me. My mom said, "Julie ... maybe it's you who's afraid you'll have a boyfriend."

JEREMY:

I said I was okay with it, right? I already told James —

AMY:

Are you comfortable with your gay sexuality?

DANI:

If you're wrestling with guilt and periods of depression, you'll be better off waiting to tell your parents. Coming out to them may require tremendous energy on your part; it will require a reserve of positive self-image.

KRIS:

Like I have!

JEREMY:

I can't sleep at night. Everything is hard now, and it's so confusing. It's too much. It's like —

AMY:

What is your general relationship with your parents?

DANI:

If you've gotten along well and have always known their love — and shared your love for them in return — chances are they'll be able to deal with the issue in a positive way.

JEREMY:

I love them, I love them both. So much. But it's hard to talk to them sometimes. Like, my dad —

TIM:

My parents loved Tina, my ex-girlfriend, right? And after we broke up, mom and I were shopping — and keep in mind, I haven't told them yet — and I saw this sweater. Dear god. It said, "World's Coolest Grandma", and I was like, "That is the ugliest piece of shit I have ever seen." And my mom was like, "I'd wear that sweatshirt. I'd wear a sweatshirt like that around. But I don't know when I'm gonna get any grandkids, between you and your brother. And I know no one's gonna marry Tony." Because my brother's just a huge asshole. I just started laughing. And we laughed about it together.

JEREMY:

I want to —

AMY:

Is this your decision?

DANI:

Not everyone should come out to their parents. Don't be pressured into it if

you're not sure you'll be better off by doing so. No matter what their response.

They exit.

KRIS:

I don't know if that sounds right.

BROOKE:

Is this something you want to do, kiddo? Because you don't have to listen to those pamphlets, or whatever.

JEREMY:

I need to. I can't think about anything else.

BROOKE:

What do you think is going to happen?

JEREMY:

I don't know. Part of me — the rational part, I guess — knows that they love me. My dad never says so out loud, but I know he does. When he misses my plays and can't come and stuff, I know that it hurts him. And my mom — yeah, no question.

DEVON:

But you're still afraid.

JEREMY:

Yeah. Yeah, I really am.

ROSS:

You should be. This is a hard old world. And you live in Montana. What did you think ... it was all "tra la la la" and picking daises and skipping down the lane holding hands with your wonderful perfect boyfriend? There's a lot of people out there — a helluva lot of people — who are going to hate you. Without even knowing you. They kill people like us, you know.

Beat.

JEREMY:

I don't know what's going to happen. Not really. Because what if —

BROOKE:

That's going to drive you crazy, if you keep doing that to yourself. The "What If?" game. You're doing this for you, Jeremy. Not for anybody else. You do it if you're ready. When you're ready. Nobody else can tell you what

to do.

6. How Can You Know?

Bryce and Cameron become "Dad I (Les)" and "Dad II (Jerry)", and Brooke and Julie become "Mom I (Sally)" and "Mom II (Judy)".

SALLY:

My son is very butch - that's the term, isn't it ? butch? - so I thought, after he told me, he can't be gay!

JUDY:

We didn't talk about it. Not in our house. Not ever.

SALLY:

I've gotten quite an education since then.

LES:

Society has not prepared me for this. I don't think anyone is ever prepared.

JERRY:

I didn't cry when she was born.

JUDY:

And you have a lot of expectations for your children. Every parent does. And there are things you take for granted. I had so many expectations I didn't know I had.

LES:

I mean, my father refused to drink homogenized milk because it said "homo" on the label. That never occurred to me until my son pointed it out to me later.

JERRY:

I didn't see her much growing up. I was working a lot. Someone had to. We had three other kids. Lots of mouths.

JUDY:

I just wanted her to give it a chance. After she told us. Haven't you tried at all, I said to her. How can you know? How?

SALLY:

Oh, it was challenging. We were getting calls from the principal by third grade. Poor guy. There was one little son-of-a-bitch in particular. Started calling him "faggot" when they were eight and by seventh grade was holding his arms so the other boys could punch him in the gut. If I ever see that

creep crossing the street one day —

JERRY:

I never thought about people ... like that at all. Old faggots and stuff, sure. Those guys - you know, those guys! They wear makeup and they're all fruity. We had one living down the block from us when I was a kid. We'd cross the street when we walked by his house.

SALLY:

A friend of mine in law school told me one time, "Well, I don't know any gay people." And I just sorta looked at her funny and was like, "Are you sure?" And she looked back at me, and I said, "Oh no, not me!"

LES:

He played basketball in high school because all the guys played basketball. Fairview's a little town. That's what Montana is, mostly. Little towns.

JERRY:

We come from a pretty small town, so ...

LES:

Which is unfortunate. You know, for them. I can't imagine trying to get along here if I was like that.

JUDY:

When she told us, I said, "But honey, you're so pretty!"

SALLY:

But nobody wants that for their child, really.

JUDY:

Expectations.

LES:

We talked about grandchildren. He swears up and down that he wants kids. He said he'll have a kid when he wants one. You know what? I believe him.

JUDY:

We go to church every Sunday. Every. Sunday.

JERRY:

I didn't know why God was doing this. And I told her, "This is my house. You don't want to follow my rules, you can get the hell out." I said that.

SALLY:

Eh, but so what. At least my son wasn't knocking up the little Novotny girl

down the street!

JERRY:

I don't see her no more. Her mother talks to her, you know, from time to time. Around Christmas. She stopped offering me the phone awhile ago.

LES:

I don't tell him how hard it is. Was.

JUDY:

Why can't she change?

JERRY:

She doesn't want to change.

JUDY:

And I have to ask myself - what did I do? How did this happen?

JERRY:

I blame it on her mother. They were close when she was a baby. She nursed her too long. That's what my mother said.

LES:

I tell him to be careful.

JUDY:

I told her she'd be alone, that this is a lonely, miserable kind of life.

SALLY:

I tell him that we love him, his dad and me. I make sure to tell him that a lot, so I know that he knows.

JERRY:

I want to fix it. She's my little girl. I want to fix it.

SALLY:

I've learned a lot from him. He's. He's very brave.

LES:

My son is one of the bravest people I know.

JUDY:

And do you know she told me? She quoted Scripture. She quoted Scripture to me. I Corinthians, 13:13. "But the greatest of these is love."

JERRY:

I just wish she'd come home. I just wish she'd be my little girl again. I wish.

SALLY, LES, JERRY, and JUDY:

The greatest of these ...

JUDY:

... is love.

7. Mom

Jeremy approaches his Mom (Paige). She's watching television on the couch.

MOM:

Hi hon! I thought you and James went for coffee.

JEREMY:

I came back a little early.

MOM:

That's okay. You've been spending a lot of time with him.

JEREMY:

I guess.

MOM:

You wanna watch some TV? It's an old Dynasty rerun.

JEREMY:

Yeah. Okay. Hey Mom -

MOM:

I used to watch this when you were a baby. What?

JEREMY:

I wanted to talk to you about ... um ... *(to the audience)* I can't do this.

MOM:

Here, let me turn this down.

JEREMY:

We can talk about it later —

MOM:

No, it's fine! Look. Commercial.

He struggles for a moment.

JEREMY:

Did you ever want to move away from here, Mom?

MOM:

From the farm?

JEREMY:

Yeah. I guess. But ... you know. From this part of the country. From Montana. Some place ... I don't know ... bigger?

MOM:

Not recently.

JEREMY:

But you have. Before?

MOM:

Oh, I think everyone has before. You getting antsy for graduation? College?

JEREMY:

Yeah, that too.

MOM:

Hon. You can tell me now.

JEREMY:

What?

MOM:

I know you don't really think I'm an idiot. Which is why you're about to tell me exactly what is wrong. What's put those dark circles under your eyes. And what's been making you cry out in the middle of the night.

JEREMY:

I haven't —

She stares at him.

He starts to get up.

Maybe we can talk about this later -

MOM:

See, now you're scaring me a little. Jeremy. Tell me. What's going on?

He looks at her. His mouth opens, then closes. His hands curl into fists white with frustration.

I don't know what else to say or what else to ask or how I can make you understand that you can tell me anything you have to, baby, anything in the world. Haven't I told you that before? Your dad and me? You can always come to us. You don't have to be afraid.

JEREMY:

I can't help it, I can't help it, I'm afraid and I'm sorry -

He begins to cry.

MOM:

What are you sorry about? It's okay. Go on, honey, go on -

JEREMY:

Mom, I'm ... God, I feel like I'm letting you down or something.

MOM:

You have never, ever done that. Never in your whole life. Jeremy. Tell me what is going on.

JEREMY:

All right! Okay. Okay. I'm. I think I'm. Um. I think I'm. *(A gulp of air.)*
Gay.

They look at each other for a moment. Mom studies his face carefully, then begins to smile.

MOM:

Honey. That's fine. I mean, I don't want to say, "Is that all?" but really ... is that ...

JEREMY:

All? Yeah. That's. Um. All. Isn't that enough?

MOM:

Is that why you're so upset?

JEREMY:

I thought you'd be upset.

MOM:

I am, a little. But not in a bad way! You scared me, was all. I thought something really terrible was happening. Like drugs or — (*She frowns.*) It's not drugs, is it, Jeremy?

He laughs a little, a slightly hysterical sound, high with relief.

JEREMY:

No. A world of no. This ... this is enough for now. (*Then, in a small voice*) So ... you're not ... um ... mad? At me?

She hugs him tightly.

MOM:

Oh my baby, I've always known. Since you were a little kid first walking, I've known. I was just waiting for you to tell me.

JEREMY:

I don't — I can't — I mean, god, you don't have any idea how good this feels. To, you know, finally tell you.

MOM:

Maybe I should've said something before.

JEREMY:

Maybe. Nah. You'd be, like, stealing my thunder. I'm kind of a drama queen.

MOM:

I sorta figured.

JEREMY:

So you're really not mad?

MOM:

I love you no matter what. No. Matter. What. Just so long as you're happy. That's all I want for you. Is for you to be happy.

Beat, happy moment of togetherly silence. He puts his head on her shoulder.

And of course you're going to have to tell your father.

He looks at her sharply. Opens his mouth. Can't say a word.

8. James

James and Jeremy are hanging out at James' house, watching movies.

JAMES:

And you still haven't told him yet.

JEREMY:

I meant to. I mean, I'm going to. I will. Stop looking at me like that.

JAMES:

When I said, "Go at your own pace," I didn't mean for you to do this whole snail imitation. If you're not gonna tell your dad, who is? Do you really want your mom to do it for you? You don't, right?

JEREMY:

Easy for you to say.

JAMES:

Yeah, real easy.

JEREMY:

You've been out for two years. To your parents and everything and everybody at school, and —

JAMES:

Did I ever tell you why I came out when I did?

JEREMY:

At the end of sophomore year?

JAMES:

Yeah. I picked that time on purpose. (*Jeremy looks at him, waiting expectantly.*) Gym class.

JEREMY:

But we don't have gym class after — oh. Oh.

JAMES:

No one really says anything to me now, but for the first couple weeks. Yeah. It was pretty bad. Mostly people like, cooing at me in the halls or whatever. In the locker room.

JEREMY:

(*laughing*):
Cooing?

JAMES:

Yeah. Like ... (*exaggerated effeminate*) "James ... James ..." "Hey James ... if you were on a bus full of faggots would you get off?" Stuff like that. This one time — god, they ... (*He stops, brooding.*)

JEREMY:

What?

JAMES:

I'll tell you some other time. You don't wanna hear that story now.

JEREMY:

I hate this place. I hate this state.

JAMES:

Do you?

JEREMY:

Don't you?

JAMES:

Not always. I mean, yeah, I wanna get out of Montana, sure, but I love it here too. It's what I know, man. And it's different. You know. From other places. And high school's been kinda cool. Speech and debate, drama stuff ... meeting you. So I guess I owe Montana for that.

JEREMY:

Why meeting me? I didn't do anything.

JAMES

(*quickly*):

Right. So ... you still got a thing for Kent?

JEREMY:

Not really. I don't think I ever really did. He was just ... what do you mean, meeting me?

JAMES:

Hey, look at the time. You've probably gotta get home. Bed time and stuff.

JEREMY:

The movie's not over.

James helps Jeremy up, pushes him towards the door, rushing.

JAMES:

Eh, close enough. I'll call you tomorrow.

James tries to walk away, but Jeremy hugs him goodnight. They stand close, and their embrace lasts just a little bit too long. James breaks it suddenly.

Good night.

Jeremy stands alone, amazed, trembling a little.

JEREMY:

What just happened?

Tyler appears.

TYLER:

You're pretty lucky. You got a guy right here. Most of the people in this state are too scared to go out and be who they are, so they just stay home and sit on the computer or whatever. That's like their way of connecting to the gay community, and it just makes me sad. Away from reality so much. James is right here, right now.

JEREMY:

I never thought ... this feeling. I've never felt it before. Not really.

TYLER:

Don't you want a boyfriend?

JEREMY:

Do I have to answer that right now? I'm not ... you know. Ready for that. Just yet.

TYLER:

When will you ever be?

JEREMY:

I just started coming out. One step at a time.

TYLER:

I was just barely not engaged anymore, my senior year of high school, and we went on a class trip to D.C., and I ended up hooking up with the guy who was my roommate. This kid from Oklahoma.

JEREMY:

Was he gay?

TYLER:

At first he said he wasn't, and then we ended up doing this weird long distance thing, and he came up here and visited me a few times, and I went down there and visited him once, and then when it got close to graduation he freaked out and decided he wasn't gay anymore. Then he joined the army.

JEREMY:

Jeez.

TYLER:

Once in awhile I'll get a letter from him, saying that he misses me and stuff, and that he wants me back, and about a month after I get one of those I get another one saying he's just really confused and not really gay. So?

JEREMY:

So ... what?

TYLER:

How do you feel about him?

JEREMY:

James? We've been friends forever. And we're closer since I came out of course. We hang out a lot more. A lot more. We talked about it, you know, for, like, three hours one time, just sitting in his car talking about our childhoods. Three hours. (*Beat.*) Oh my god.

TYLER:

Uh huh.

JEREMY:

Oh my god. Do I have a crush on him? No. It can't be. Can't — he's like my best friend, I can't have a crush on him.

TYLER:

Right. You're just good friends.

JEREMY:

We are! And that's —

TYLER:

Whatever.

He disappears. James reappears.

JEREMY:
— all we are.

JAMES:
We have to talk.

JEREMY:
Yeah. Hey! What the hell? You just threw me out.

JAMES:
I didn't throw — will you just listen to me?

JEREMY:
The movie wasn't even over, and we were talking, having this nice little conversation, and then you just — boom! — out of the blue want me to skedaddle —

JAMES:
Jeremy.

JEREMY:
— and you can't just do that to people, James, you can't just lead them around —

JAMES:
Jeremy.

JEREMY:
— because sooner or later —

JAMES:
I think I like you.

JEREMY:
— they're just going to up and say ... really? You do? Really?

JAMES:
Yeah. I think I do.

JEREMY:
Me?

JAMES:
Dummy. Yes. You.

JEREMY:

Why?

JAMES:

Don't ask questions like that. You don't have to. Ever.

JEREMY:

Oh. Okay. Hey James?

JAMES:

Yeah?

JEREMY:

I think. Um. That I. Like you. Too.

JAMES:

Really? I mean ... really?

JEREMY:

Really.

JAMES:

Oh god. Oh god! I thought — this sounds so stupid — I thought that you'd hate me or something. If I told you.

JEREMY:

Now who's the dummy?

JAMES:

I was worried. I wanted to say something forever, but I thought that you — I didn't know if — but I felt it tonight —

JEREMY:

When we hugged, yeah, me too. Like. Like electricity.

JAMES:

Yeah. Then. I felt it. Something. And I ... I wanted. To be with you. Just you. And I had to come back and find you.

JEREMY:

You wanna be with me?

JAMES:

Nobody else. Nobody else on this earth.

He leans in. Their eyes close. They kiss.

From behind them, we hear Julie:

JULIE:

But the greatest of these ... the greatest of these ... is love.

Lights down and out.

ACT TWO: Outloud**9. Letter (I)**

Kyle enters as "Hunter".

HUNTER:

Letter to the Billings Gazette, November 14, 2004. Well, I knew it would happen, I was just hoping that maybe Montanans would see how ridiculous it was. The gay marriage ban passed by a huge margin. After I graduated from high school, I came as quickly as I could out to Seattle, because I knew I wasn't welcome in Montana. I suggest all the other gays in Montana do the same - our health and safety and the ability to see our partners on their death bed and raise our children is much more important than wanting to live in the most beautiful state in the union. I always tell my friends who go through Montana to drive through quickly and just enjoy the scenery, but don't stop to meet the people. Montana really is beautiful on the outside, ugly on the inside. With all the issues groups could have focused on this year — unemployment, terrorism, homelessness, child abuse, nuclear war, education, addiction, Iraq, Afghanistan, North Korea — but you know what was scarier than all of this to voters and groups like the Montana Family Foundation? This 19-year-old boy loving another boy for the rest of my life. Hunter Thomas, Seattle, Washington.

He exits.

10. Whales

Lights up on Brooke. Jeremy is sitting in a chair, listening to her.

BROOKE:

Growing up, I wanted to be a marine biologist. Always. It was a passion of mine when I was a child, but I was so busy surviving that I couldn't put a lot of energy into it.

JEREMY:

Surviving?

BROOKE:

I grew up in a really dysfunctional, abusive environment. And it was scary. I was on edge all the time. I spent the majority of my growing up learning to survive. My mom died a few months after she married my stepfather. He was very abusive. So I learned to survive by telling white lies and learning how not to upset the apple cart. My brother learned how to survive by not telling lies and upsetting the apple cart. Right now I don't have any close contact with my family. There are a couple of people I still cherish, but

when my brother was almost killed by my stepfather I went to them and said, “You’ve got to do something.” They didn’t do anything. He would just beat the hell out of my brother. One time he put him in the hospital.

As a kid I tried to survive and stay alive in a very dysfunctional, explosive, violent atmosphere, and I spent years and years just surviving until I finally figured out that, to really survive, you’ve got to give up this whole notion of surviving. You have to let go and jump into the void. Taking risks. When you’re surviving you’re not taking risks because it’s too scary ... and too risky. (*She laughs.*)

The one thing I do know is that I still struggle with homophobia. Internalized homophobia. That’s risky.

JEREMY
(*mystified*):
Internalized homophobia.

BROOKE:
Right. Because it seems like there’s so much we can do with external forces — other people, other situations ... if they get too close, and they’re threatening or going to hurt us ... but inside, it’s a little tougher.

JEREMY:
That’s a lot. I don’t even know how to deal with what’s outside yet.

BROOKE:
I think too many times people take the wrong approach to dealing with these issues.

The last time we went to Oregon we saw a pod of transient killer whales. They come through about once a year and we got to see them all day, really up close, and just kind of followed them up and down. We knew where they were going, and we knew the best place to get out on the rocks, out into the current that they were in. It was ... awe inspiring. There was one big male, huge huge male, who was obviously the leader of the pack, and there were about seven others who were with him, and I’ve never seen orcas in the wild. I’ve seen gray whales and hump backed whales, but I’ve never seen killer whales, and to see them up close, and to see their mouths gape open and to see all their teeth, and to see their tongue ... their coloring, the black and white coloring, and the just ... pure muscle. And the way that they move through the ocean ... just beautiful.

And then these three whale watching boats came. And they were not being respectful. They were kinda trapping the killer whales into this one area. And the big dominant ~~male~~ got aggressive. And when whales get aggressive —

which I've read about but never seen - they start doing these tail slaps, and they do fin slaps, directed towards the whatever it is that they're saying, "Hey, this is not okay with us." And so they were doing it to these boats, and on one hand I was thinking, "I wanna get ahold of somebody and have these people fined, because they're closer than they should be." The second thing I thought was, "This huge animal is showing such amazing ability to reason and problem solve by not just going and taking a huge bite out of that boat." I mean, talk about restraint. It was so obvious that this big huge killer whale knew exactly how close he could get to the boat without causing them any damage. Trying to say to them, "It is not okay to be this close to us."

Trying to reason without actually hurting anybody. Going along, but not accepting that things aren't the way they should be. See?

JEREMY:
Sort of.

BROOKE:
You cannot fight violence with violence. It just doesn't work.

JEREMY:
But that's what we do. People. Us. That's what we do.

BROOKE:
You don't have to. You always have a choice. How are you going to fight, Jeremy?

JEREMY:
There's fighting now?

BROOKE:
There's always something to fight.

11. Label-less

TIM:
You hear about coming out parties, or whatever. I don't really know about those. I never had one. By society's labels, my sexuality would probably be gay — I mean, look at me. Come on. Musical theatre, anyone? But that's not really what it is for me. I am label-less.

I was in a fraternity. For instance. That's kind of a big deal for some people, you know. There's this whole mythological aspect for some 'mo's — Abercrombie and Fitch, you know, that whole homoerotic advertisement thing, and I mean, honestly ... the models are all nekkid half the time! They

aren't even wearing the clothes they're supposed to be advertising!

Yes, this is an Abercrombie shirt, thank you very much.

But I digress.

I was a little worried, you know, about the whole (*uses air quotes*) "fraternity aspect", I suppose you would say. How people would react, being brothers, whatever. "No, I don't want to have sex with you, I find you all repugnant!"

But I didn't want to be friends with the people I went to high school with. From Great Falls, my god, could you die? Even my parents wanted to move to Missoula, because Great Falls has nothing. Great Falls has a military base. And a lot of casinos. And an oil refinery. Let us not forget the oil refinery.

When I did orientation, my small group leader was a fraternity guy, and he had told us about rush, whatever, come out if you want to — ha ha — and I didn't want to be friends with all the same people I had been friends with in high school, and there were five or six of them already that were constantly ... schwoom! One big group. So I decided, hey, I'm going to go through rush, see if I can meet some new people. And the house I rushed, Sigma Nu, one of the guys had gone to Missoula Children's Theatre camp with me, awesome guy. Yeah. Theatre camp. How could they not have known?

But dude, I was pledge of the year. My name is still on a plaque in the house. I don't even know what I did to earn such a prestigious award. The first two years in the house were really good, even though at the time I was starting to get into a lot of very harmful things. But originally it was great.

Oh yeah. I had a girlfriend. Of course I did! Tina. Gorgeous girl.

Julie appears as "Tina" and stands silently behind him, concealing a large sombrero behind her back.

I wasn't out in the house at all. Ever. But there was this one guy in the house that I had ... mmmm ... a very different relationship with than I had with anybody else. So to speak. Mike.

Cameron appears as "Mike" and stands on the opposite side of Tim. He and Tina give each other questioning, curious looks.

It culminated into making out one night after way too many margaritas. Whoops! And then it kinda diminished after that, because he — I don't think

— will ever be comfortable with his true self. I mean, we had this very long ... you know, almost a year ... this relationship, and to me it was more than just a little kissy here, a little kissy there ... but ... yeah, I think he's gay. And he'll never admit it to himself. It's sad. And we're not in contact anymore.

Mike disappears.

He lives in Portland now. Why stick around here, huh?

He's the reason I came out to my girlfriend. Tina and I had broken up by the time Mike came around, but we had become such good friends, and we realized that our dating was out of the context that we were such good friends to begin with and we had so much in common ... whatever. So we became very good friends after we dated.

And we used to have Monday night drinking nights. I know, right? Any night ending in "y", actually, but at least on Mondays they were official! She'd come over, and she'd have this sombrero, and we'd wear it while we were drinking. And so actually in a complete drunken stupor wearing —

Tina deposits the sombrero on Tim's head.

— thank you — a sombrero was how I came out to my girlfriend. (*He laughs.*) That's always going to be special. It's Tina, you know? I just told her ... (*He turns to her.*) "Mike and I are more than just really good friends."

TINA:

You were having all these issues with him, right? Big, weird fights. I sorta figured.

TIM:

I needed someone to talk to, and I didn't want to out him or whatever, but I figured talking to you would be the thing to do, so it went (*snaps fingers*) like that.

TINA:

I had an idea, though. That you were. You know.

TIM:

A big ol' queer.

TINA:

Yup.

TIM:
Especially when I said “I was with Mike”.

They laugh. She disappears, taking the sombrero with her. He watches her go. Pauses.

I left the house after that. It just wasn’t what I needed anymore. There were a lot of other things going on too that just — do you remember the spray paint incident?

Ross and Tyler enter as Frat Boy Pete and Frat Boy Scott.

PETE:
It was really bad-ass, dude. Like, we were just —

SCOTT:
Oh my god, blitzed. Out of our minds, man. Fucking wasted.

PETE:
It was just a joke, man, really —

SCOTT:
And it was really fuckin’ funny, if you ask me.

PETE:
But me ‘n Scott, we got some spray paint —

SCOTT:
Just a coupla cans.

PETE:
— and we, like, painted all over Sigma Chi’s wall. Big ol’ dicks and shit. Fags in that house deserved it. Scammin’ on my girlfriend —

SCOTT:
And my girlfriend. One of ‘em got all over my girl too, remember?

PETE:
We got in pretty bad trouble.

SCOTT:
But we apologized.

PETE:
Yeah. And we meant it. We did!

Kris enters.

KRIS:

I was Lambda treasurer at the time. It was stupid stuff, but, you know, it was still pretty offensive. "Sigma Chi are fags." "I eat ass." "We love cock."

PETE:

It was a bad choice on my part.

KRIS:

No one at Lambda was mad. The guys responsible actually came to a Lambda meeting, and seemed genuinely interested. (*Beat*) Even though they were sorta forced to go.

PETE:

It was pretty cool. You know, not bad. Not at all what I was expecting. They weren't trying to, like, hit on us or anything. It wasn't a get in our pants kinda deal. At all.

SCOTT:

I don't know. A lot of it seems pretty stupid now. I never thought about it before, but I don't know any gay people. I mean, I didn't before.

KRIS:

We told them ... (*to Pete and Scott*) You guys are community leaders, so what can you do to discourage anti-homosexual behavior? What you do as community leaders people follow.

Kris, Scott, and Pete exit.

TIM:

Yeah, so that was my fraternity. My house. Some of the guys involved weren't even in the house, they were just pledging at the time, but starting from that point I was like, "I'm surrounding myself with a lot of negative shit. I have to get out of this." So I broke my housing contract and moved into an apartment with two of my friends. I wasn't ready to come out to anyone, much less a bunch of assholes who took it upon themselves to be ... to be hateful.

A lot of people know now. And they're like, "Well, whatever." And the people that do have a problem with it, my brothers in the house would defend me ... (*makes a noise of disgust*) Like I need to be defended. I can pretty much take care of myself. You know, it's very funny, but I do think if I had come into the house openly gay there would have been a lot of people I would never have gotten to know. I don't even know if I'd have gotten in, really.

That's something that's hard to know. It's really hard to know.

I haven't come out to my parents yet. I'm not afraid to, but ... it just hasn't been the right time. Oh, I'm gonna. Sure I'm gonna! It's going to be done. And soon. Because I'm leaving for New York. Big Apple here I come!

Okay, yeah. I was a little worried. Still am. Otherwise I would've gotten it over with already, right? But it's become so positive, this whole experience. Coming out. Even if I never had a party. And it's only strengthened my own resolve that I can do anything that I want to do.

I just gotta do it now, that's all.

12. Dad

Jeremy sits with his Dad (David), who is sipping a beer. It's late summer, and they're watching the sunset.

DAD:

Look at that sky. Goes on just about forever, doesn't it.

JEREMY:

Yeah. Yeah, it does.

DAD:

Looks like it's on fire. You're gonna miss it if you go.

JEREMY:

A lot.

DAD:

You seen James?

JEREMY:

Not since I got back.

DAD:

He called.

JEREMY:

Yeah. I saw the note.

DAD:

You call him back?

JEREMY:
Not ... not yet.

DAD:
Any particular reason?

JEREMY:
I'm just. Busy.

DAD:
Sitting around all day reading books really sucks up all your time.

JEREMY:
That's not — yeah. I guess so.

DAD:
He stopped by yesterday afternoon.

JEREMY:
Oh?

DAD:
I told him you were busy. Told him to come back tomorrow. Did he?

JEREMY:
No.

DAD:
When's he leaving again?

JEREMY:
I don't know.

He stands up.

I should probably —

DAD:
I know. Books gotta be read.

JEREMY:
I feel like I'm behind. Like, if I do go to grad school or New York or whatever that I won't be ... that I won't know as much as everybody else. Like, I'll be farther behind. Less well read.

DAD:
That's what you said.

Jeremy stands uncertainly. Dad calmly sips his beer. They hold this for a moment.

JEREMY:
I should go in.

He starts to move away.

DAD:
You could've told me yourself, you know.

Jeremy freezes. For a moment he doesn't say anything. Doesn't look at his father.

JEREMY:
I know. I should've.

DAD:
I had a friend in the army. I ever tell you that?

JEREMY:
No. You didn't.

DAD:
Good friend of mine. Good guy. Good man. He died of AIDS a few years ago.

JEREMY:
Jesus, Dad. That isn't what this — that's not what it's like. What it's all about.

DAD:
Oh? They find a cure?

JEREMY:
That isn't what I meant. I don't have it. You know. HIV or whatever.

DAD:
Didn't say that you did.

JEREMY:
Good. 'Cause I don't. *(Beat)* I'm sorry that I didn't tell you myself.

DAD:

I know you are. But if you're gonna be off here in awhile, I just wanted to let you know. That I know.

JEREMY:

I knew you did. Mom told you?

DAD:

Before you graduated. She never told you either, did she. She claims it slipped her mind.

JEREMY:

It's hard. That's all.

DAD:

And we don't talk much, you and me.

JEREMY:

No.

DAD:

No.

Jeremy sits back down. Silence for a moment.

It's okay with me. Just so you know. I don't care what it is — if you're gay or straight, or gay now and then straight in a couple of years, or then bi —

JEREMY:

That's not how it works, Dad. Not with me, anyway. Don't worry. I'm. Um. I'm pretty gay.

DAD:

You're my son. That's good enough for me.

The sun is almost gone.

You going to call him?

JEREMY:

I don't know.

DAD:

Well hey, if you're sure that you don't want to —

JEREMY:

He left me, Dad. All right? That's what happened. He left me a long time ago. I don't know why, because you know what? It hurt too much to ask why. And we tried things, and they fell apart, because that's what happens, things ... things fall apart, and you can't ever —

I'm going inside. It's getting cold.

DAD:

What are you afraid of?

JEREMY:

Nothing! God! Why do I have to be afraid of something? *(beat)* Me. Mostly. How I talk to him. I haven't — we haven't been very nice to each other.

DAD:

Your mom and me — sometimes we weren't very nice to each other either. As long as you're happy, kiddo.

JEREMY:

You guys weren't so happy.

DAD:

For awhile we were. In the end, it wasn't pretty, but we did it and got through it and it's over now.

JEREMY:

She hasn't run you over with her car.

DAD:

It's not from lack of trying.

They laugh.

JEREMY:

That's part of what I'm afraid of. We make up and then we don't and then we do and we don't. Seems like all we do sometimes is scream at each other. And he's in Chicago most of the time, and he's going back there anyway, and we didn't talk for awhile, but —

DAD:

Do you still love him?

Jeremy thinks for a second.

JEREMY:

Yeah. I think I do. And I want to leave. I want to get out of here. But there's something else. I don't know what. Holding me here. That's the stupid thing. I used to hate Montana. All the time I was growing up. Now I don't want to leave. Or maybe I do. God, I just don't know, I just don't!

DAD:

You'll figure it out. You're good at that. You know that, right?

JEREMY:

No. When I was in high school I just wanted to be like everyone else. I wanted to be cool. Now I just want someone to tell me what to do. Where to go. How to be.

DAD:

And you know that's never gonna happen.

JEREMY:

That's what I was afraid of.

DAD:

Do you think you guys can fix it? Whatever it is? Maybe get back together?

JEREMY:

I wonder sometimes. I wonder what forever would be like.

DAD:

Feels like forever, sometimes.

13. Letter (II)

Amy enters as "Amber".

AMBER:

Letter to the Billings Gazette, December 2, 2004. First and foremost I would like to say that I and the rest of my family and friends are proud residents of this great Christian state of Montana. We are also proud to say that none of our best friends, our sisters, brothers, our sons, daughters, mother nor our fathers, etc., are homosexuals. We are good Christian people who respect the laws and wishes of God our father. We would like to bring your attention to Genesis 19 and Jude 1: 7 in the King James Bible. Montana has not condoned homosexuality since 1889 when it gained statehood and of this we are very proud. If homosexuals are so ashamed to call Montana their home, then as a human with the freedom of choice, homosexuals are given the choice to move to a state which is willing to accommodate sinful practices. Who are homosexuals to discriminate against good Christian people and their choice

to vote against the violation of the will of God? Amber Unruh, Richey.

She exits.

14. One Spring Break

Susan enters.

SUSAN:

The constitution of Montana states: Formalities. Marriage is a personal relationship between a man and a woman arising out of a civil contract to which the consent of the parties is essential. A marriage licensed, solemnized, and registered as provided in this chapter is valid in this state.

Dani enters with Brooke, who will play Tamiko.

DANI:

So we were kinda joking around about getting married while we were in Portland on spring break last year, me and Tamiko, and we were both scared, so we were like, Nah, we'll see how we feel. So we got there and we were, like, flirting around with the issue. So I was like, well, I'll just call and see if they're even still giving out licenses.

SUSAN:

The following marriages are prohibited.

DANI:

I called, and they were like, "Yeah, we're giving out licenses, come right down." And I was like (*to Tamiko*), so, do you wanna go down and get a license?

TAMIKO:

Yeah, we'll go down and get it. We can fill it out and stuff, but we don't have to turn it in if we don't want to.

SUSAN:

(a) a marriage entered into prior to the dissolution of an earlier marriage of one of the parties; (b) a marriage between an ancestor and a descendant or between a brother and a sister, whether the relationship is by the half or the whole blood, or between first cousins; (c) a marriage between an uncle and a niece or between an aunt and a nephew, whether the relationship is by the half or the whole blood ...

DANI:

We filled out our application, and we met another lesbian couple who had

been together for fifteen years from Tacoma, Washington, who had come to Portland to get married too. And it was cool to see how long they'd been together. And I feel lucky and kinda spoiled in away, because mine and 'Miko's generation hasn't had to fight so hard as other generations.

SUSAN:

(d) a marriage between persons of the same sex.

DANI:

Right after we set up the marriage ceremony on Tuesday, we went to the mall to look for rings, 'cause it was something we had to pick out and buy, and we didn't have a lot of money. So we got ten dollar sterling silver rings. That's what we wear. These ten dollar sterling silver rings.

Tamiko flashes the rings, inside little ring boxes.

And 'Miko's had to be sized 'cause it was too big. So we were like (*to Susan, who has become "Salesgirl"*), We need it tomorrow by six! Can you do that? We're getting married for spring break!

SALESGIRL:

Sure! We'll put that right through. Right at the top of the list.

DANI:

We got to the church about an hour early after we picked up the rings and we just sat there in the parking lot because no one was there, because she was going to come in and marry us during choir practice, so that some of the choir members could be witnesses. We were just waiting for people to show up, and we were both really nervous, and we both probably asked each other three different times ...

DANI and TAMIKO:

Are you sure you wanna do this?

TAMIKO:

Are you sure?

They look at each other somberly, then break into big grins.

DANI:

Finally Deb showed up.

Susan becomes "Deb".

DEB:

Are you Dani and Tamiko?

DANI:

Yeah. Yes. That's us. *(To the audience)* And she just talked for awhile about what marriage meant.

DEB:

But you guys have to promise me that you'll get pre-marital counseling when you get back to Missoula. All right?

TAMIKO:

Of course!

DANI:

Um ... totally.

DEB:

Usually I don't marry people before I've made sure they've done pre-marital counseling. *(She thinks)* But this may be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Don't you think?

They nod fervently.

But you have to promise me ... all right. Let's get to the good part.

DANI:

We got married in the church library.

Bryce, Cameron, and Amy enter as choir members to act as witnesses. Two wear purple, one wears green. Paige, Kyle, Kris, and Tim enter, each holding a religious banner for Lent.

And the cool thing was - when me and 'Miko had been talking about getting married before, we had always said that we wanted our wedding colors to be purple and green. The church was decorated for Lent because it was around that time, and purple is the color of Lent, so the whole stage had these banners on it, and we stood there to take our wedding photos with our little disposable camera. And the choir was practicing somewhere, and it sounded like, otherworldly, coming through the walls of the library. We still had music.

Then the whole thing got very, very strange. 'Miko was getting choked up, and I was just ... *(she giggles)* ... well, I got the giggles. I couldn't stop laughing. It was the nerves, you know?

Tamiko puts a ring on Dani's finger.

TAMIKO:

With this ring, I thee wed. In sickness and in health, for richer and for poorer, as long as we both shall live.

Dani looks at it in awe.

DANI:

It felt so weird on my hand, because I'd never worn a ring on my finger, ever in my whole life.

Dani puts the other ring on Tamiko's finger.

With this ring, I thee wed. *(She giggles a little.)*

DEB:

The brides may kiss.

From somewhere out of the audience's view, we hear the rest of the choir — Jeremy, David, Ross, Devon, Julie, and Tyler — singing a soft, sweet hymn.

Dani hugs Tamiko somewhat awkwardly, then kisses her nervously, chastely on the cheek.

TAMIKO:

Come on, what is that?

Tamiko plants a huge, passionate kiss on Dani. Susan and the witnesses clap.

DANI:

And we have pictures of us pointing at our rings, like, yay! Signing the marriage certificate. And we have a picture with the pastor, pictures of us kissing, stuff like that.

Dani and Tamiko take hands.

And that was our wedding.

15. Danger

BROOKE:

So you've got a fairly big decision to make.

JEREMY:

I have auditions for grad schools next week. In New York. The farthest east I've been is North Dakota.

CAMERON:

That's where I grew up. It's not much different than here. Except when my dad told people, "We're takin' the boy to school," his friends told him, "Ah, Montana. Where the men are men, and the sheep run scared." What the hell does that mean? I thought it was hilarious.

JEREMY:

I'm just thinking - there's got to be something bigger. Something better. Somewhere where I can be ... whoever it is I am. Where I don't feel quite so ...

Are you ever afraid? Here?

ROSS:

I'm not afraid of having the shit kicked out of me. I'm afraid of having people hate me. That's scarier to me than getting beat up. Mental wounds don't heal like a broken nose or a broken jaw.

CAMERON:

There's something that rubs me raw about people who are constantly talking about how gay people are treated poorly. Lemme tell you something. Everybody is treated poorly. Either you're a hick or you're a Jew or you're something. Even if you're the All American White Boy, you've still got a small penis or something else. Or your girlfriend cheats on you. Everybody gets picked on for something.

JEREMY:

Last year my friend Brandy and I were walking to class, and it was during Gay Pride Week for the school, and they had all these signs all up and down the oval.

Susan becomes "Brandy". Bryce, Julie, Amy, Kris, and David appear holding signs with gay positive mottoes.

And I was so surprised they stayed up all day. And this was at night, like six or seven o'clock, and we were walking, and this guy is walking and just kicking them down.

Tyler knocks the signs out of each of their hands while Devon and Kyle laugh and egg him on.

And his friends are laughing and egging him on, and he's laughing. I felt in danger. And I was so mad. I wanted to yell at them, but Brandy was like ...

BRANDY:

No no no, he'll come and beat you.

JEREMY:

Even though I was still pissed and wanted to go yell at them, I felt that even that little act of ... I felt like it was insecurity on their parts. Like, you're being very immature about yourself by doing that. I just wanted to yell at 'em and be like ... *(to the guys, exaggeratedly)* ... Don't do that! You're ... you're insecure! You're insecure! Stop it!

They blink at him, shrug, exit.

I felt in danger then too.

DANI:

I don't know if I seriously think I would ever get attacked on campus, but every once and awhile 'Miko and I will be walking around holding hands, and it's just kinda stuff ... I don't know if it's "dumb jocks" — but that's stereotyping of them as much as they probably do of me — but you know, guys will look at us kinda funny, and I do feel scared. In Mexico, it's not unheard of for lesbian women to get raped to be "taught a lesson".

JEREMY:

After living in Missoula for five years, I realize how easily I can be myself. And be gay. And people don't care. I went back home this summer, and there was this feeling that everyone was so uptight, and they aren't as open, and aren't tolerant at all.

KYLE:

One of Montana's flaws is not having a major city over 100,000 people. That whole different kind of social life style kind of flows out to the state from big meccas, and Montana doesn't have one, so we don't get anything like that. We get little oases and that's it. It's pretty contained.

SUSAN:

But you know, now that I'm living in the South, I feel more closeted than ever. I felt safe in Missoula and I never felt like my best interests would be better served by remaining silent on the issue of sexuality, but here I don't feel like I can trust people to be rational about it.

JEREMY:

So I'll scratch the South off my list. Easy.

SUSAN:

I love Montana. I had to choose not to live there because I knew I didn't have the opportunities there that I have somewhere else. But I will go back.

TIM:

I guess just the lack of — to use the fateful "d" word — diversity ... that

lack of diversity in Montana, in this entire state, is driving me away. It's not that I don't not like it here; I just need something else for what I want to do. It's just not gonna happen here. I want theatre. I want to perform. So I'm going to New York.

TYLER:
Me too.

AMY:
Anytime I go into or come out of Amvets, I'm always watching to see who's watching me come in or go out.

KRIS:
Amvets is Missoula's only gay bar. My friends and I came out of there one night, and you know, I'm a big guy, so no one wants to mess with me. But I was standing on the corner waiting for the light to change, and this big group of drunk cowboys comes stumbling by.

Devon as "Cowboy" looks blearily at Kris.

COWBOY:
Man, you don't wanna go down there. Fags down there.

Kris is pleasant.

KRIS:
Yeah. I know.

COWBOY:
Hey. You ain't a fag, are you?

KRIS:
Yeah. But that's not a particularly nice word, you know.

COWBOY:
Oh. I want to kill faggots. All the faggots. God should kill all the faggots.

KRIS:
That's probably not a good idea.

The Cowboy nods, then stumbles off.

People are intimidated by me. I don't get harassed.

JULIE:

I volunteered for Montanans for Families and Fairness back when they were doing their primary election stuff. I did two shifts, and ... aaaaaah! I hate everyone! This one guy — they were all getting mad at my friend Alex, and I guess he was being kinda ornery with them — and this guy comes up to me, and he's really tall, and he bends down, and he's right in my face, probably in his mid-fifties, and he says, "How are you ever gonna have babies?" (*She laughs.*) That's the most violating thing anyone has ever said to me. He was like, "Man to man, woman to woman ... you want to end the human race!"

JEREMY:

I had no idea our agenda was on such a grand scale.

BROOKE:

When Matthew was killed in Wyoming — were you here at the time?

JEREMY:

Yeah. My parents were pretty freaked.

BROOKE:

There was a vigil at the church. And afterwards my friend Christina and I played some music, and the woman who organized it put up these giant posters, and the posters said, "Lesbian folk duo Raised by Wolves," and in the newspaper article it said, "Lesbian folk duo Raised by Wolves", and I was like ... oh. My. God. "Raised by Wolves" is now a lesbian folk duo. And I had visions of people driving by, driving across the bridge with guns or ... or something while we were playing, and I was terrified. Until the event happened, and then I was fine. But seeing it in print like that and kinda being publicly outed ... mixed feelings. Definite mixed feelings.

JEREMY:

I'm not afraid all the time, 'cause that's stupid, you can't just walk around being afraid all the time, but ...

ROSS:

I don't fear anymore.

JEREMY:

That must be nice.

ROSS:

It is what it is. You want to change the world? How the hell are you going to do it by scampering off like a little bunny?

JEREMY:

I don't think that I'm — change things? When did I ever —

ROSS:

What do you think happens? What do you think coming out is?

He begins pointing fingers at the others.

Why do you think she was afraid, and her, and him, and you! Why is that? I told you before what they think of us. Don't you remember what happened to those dyke professors?

BROOKE:

Ross.

ROSS:

Hey, I'm sorry, or whatever, but you know what I mean.

AMY:

On February 4, 2003, two lesbian couples sued the University of Montana and the state, because same-sex couples were denied the benefits that married heterosexual couples are granted at the university. Like health benefits. On February 8th a house that belonged to one of the couples, Carla Grayson and Adrienne Neff, burned down. Arson. They have a little boy. He was in the house at the time too.

BROOKE:

They left. Moved to Michigan. I don't think they're coming back.

ROSS:

Yeah. Them, and they're lucky to be alive, but there's Matthew Shepherd, and anybody else that gets fucked with. People are going to die. They will continue to kill us until we do something about it.

JEREMY:

Okay. I get it, I do. I just don't know what to do. And no one will tell me.

ROSS:

Running away from here — not staying, leaving because people burn your house down or knock over your signs or look at you funny on campus — that's not the way. Doesn't do anybody any good.

JEREMY:

So what have you done?

ROSS:

I tried to kill myself. Ten times, maybe more now.

JEREMY:

Oh. Hey. I'm —

ROSS:

Yeah, yeah. I've heard it all before. Don't cry for me, Argentina.

BROOKE:

Tell him why. Tell him why you did it.

ROSS:

Fine. Whatever. When Matthew Shepherd died, that was when I really started wrapping my head around it. I had gotten really heavily into pot, and I was starting to use painkillers here and there. And that was when I found the dead body. My friend Annie and me, we found this kid who had shot himself. And shortly thereafter Matthew Shepherd was murdered. That was right around the time I started realizing I, you know, had an alternate sexuality. And all those things in combination - especially being gay - led me to drinking and using a lot more. The drinking and using is what eventually led me to attempt suicide. I shut myself off from the outside world, and my mom had kicked me out, and none of my friends would come and visit me, and, um, I swallowed two bottles of pills and went to the hospital.

I changed my mind. Didn't want to die. It was all a stupid cry for help, you know? And they fed me charcoal and put me in the psych ward over night. You have to drink charcoal when you overdose on pills to bind everything in your stomach so you won't absorb it. It's horrible. Tastes like sweet decay. I tried to tell them, "Look, you need to do something for me. I am going to fucking kill myself. I'm going to, you know. Something bad is going to happen if you don't help me."

Everyone sits for a second, uncomfortable.

JULIE:

I didn't, like, consider it to the point where I planned it, but I'd say I definitely considered myself suicidal at times. For sure. Because of not being out. I didn't have anyone to talk to, and then I'd get to a point where I felt really fake. Like nothing would ever improve.

ROSS:

Great. I'm glad we could all share and learn and grow. That's not what I meant. I tried it, it didn't work, it was stupid. I just want you to understand that that is how things are. That's the real world. If you don't change things for your own damned self, no one is going to do it for you.

JEREMY:

I feel like there's this whole big world out there, and I don't want to miss it. All these things I haven't got to do yet. I've got all these stupid questions — what can I do in Montana? What kind of job can I have? What kind of life? Realistically! I just don't want to feel like I wasted my life here, you know?

James got out. If James can do it, then ...

He exits.

Ross is alone for a moment on stage. He talks directly to the audience.

ROSS:

Do I think I would try it again? There've been days lately. I have my AA sponsor, and I told him last night, "I need some relief from the constant bullshit in my head or I'm going to drink or I'm going to kill myself. It's gotta be one of the three. Get better, drink, or die." And at this point I'm not looking for a cry for help. If I get to the point of being suicidal, I would probably drink. Because it would be the only thing to shut it up for now. And if I didn't drink I probably really would kill myself this time around.

16. Lives

SUSAN:

I never thought about having a job growing up. I thought it would be nice to be famous and have people take care of me. I still don't know what I'm going to do as a career.

CAMERON:

As a little kid I wanted to be a magician and a cartoonist and a scientist.

DAVID:

I'm David. I'm out in the high school where I teach. That's been an interesting experience. But good. It led me to establish the Gay-Straight Alliance there.

CAMERON:

I don't think being gay has anything to do with your career choice, but I think that being satisfied and happy with your life and having a sense of being you, and having control of your life, and really, you're either "you" or you're somebody else's "you".

SUSAN:

I graduated with a degree in English, so I've been thinking about teaching. I have thought about it when I was going to school in Missoula, and again now that I'm living in Tennessee, but I've always worried that being gay would be a big problem.

PAIGE:

Last spring my friend Kelly from high school calls me — and you know, she never agreed with me being queer — and she says, "You are never gonna believe this."

SUSAN:

Especially now that we have the so-called "Christian right" who are determined to brainwash everyone into thinking we're after your children.

PAIGE:

And I was like, "You've fallen in love with a woman." Who happens to be her songwriter. She's on the radio, and she just signed a label, and in a year everyone is gonna know her name. But she's also a Christian, and she was married at the time.

CAMERON:

It's a dangerous thing, because as soon as you volunteer up yourself to another person, whether it's to make your mom happy or to please society, you're just acting. You're not real. Your worth is gone.

DAVID:

My adoptive mother seemed to sense that I would always be "different", and she often told me that she was afraid of how that would affect me navigating my life.

PAIGE:

And she was freaking out, and she was like, "How do you ... how do you ..." - because we grew up in the same church and with the same families, our families were best friends - "how do you reconcile yourself with god?" And I was like, "I just have to have faith that god is love."

DAVID:

Although this is the same woman who mentioned that she would cut off my penis if I was rubbing it against other boys. I think she got that idea from a nosy neighbor's phone call.

CAMERON:

In my opinion, if you want to have worth in your life, something meaningful, you have to be the only thing that you've got. Just you. And to suddenly grasp that and — ha! I'm my own person! Oh my GOD!

SUSAN:

I don't see it is a matter of pride. Just a matter of not being willing to apologize to anyone for being who you are.

PAIGE:

You know, I probably would've ended up being a minister or a youth leader. If I'd never come out. In the mission field or doing something like that.

CAMERON:

If I was in an Indian tribe, I don't want to be the one chipping away at rocks making the tools that make people's lives better or whatever. Or worse. I want to be someone that deals with people. I want to make a big impact on people. Like the medicine man. Or the chief. The elder. The philosopher, maybe.

PAIGE:

I was discriminated against in my church. By other youth leaders. One day they'd be like, "Hey, Paige!" And the next day they'd turn around and walk away.

DAVID:

Since I came out to my high school - in a flaming display, I might add - I have definitely died to about a third of the staff. That can be limiting, especially if you're considering involvement in a variety of activities across the system. Somehow those moves just don't happen so easily after that.

PAIGE:

I was actually in church around Christmas time last year. There was this girl I had grown up with, Bethany, and she was one of my best friends growing up, and I hadn't seen her mother since my senior year of high school. And me and her mother were pretty tight. So I'm in church, and I see Bethany, and I haven't seen Bethany since my freshman year of college. And she's with her mother. So I'm like, "Well hey, Miz Falls!" And she just barely gave me a smile and turned around and faced the other way. Then Kelly walks up. And Miz Falls is just so excited and glowing, and she kinda ... (*exaggerated excitement, opens her arms*) "Kelly!" (*She laughs.*) And Kelly's the one who's doing her songwriter, a forty-five year old woman, and she was married at the time! But it really hurt my feelings. It had been so long since someone had treated me like that because of who I'm in love with, I just about flipped out.

SUSAN:

I am who I am, and I will not pretend to be somebody else for a paycheck.

DAVID:

But I suspect my partner and I will eventually move to another country to live or a more metropolitan area. These are definitely the pioneering years for queer people here in Montana. Interesting work, and thankfully there are younger generations to come.

SUSAN:

I think I would make a great teacher, but I'm not willing to live a lie for that. And that's too bad too, because I know a lot of people who have a lot to give to society and this country but feel like they can't because of the laws and prejudices that govern us. It's really kinda sad, you know?

17. Stars

James and Jeremy are sitting side by side, comfortably, staring up at the stars.

JAMES:

The grass is damp. These pants are probably ruined.

JEREMY:

My dad and I were doing this a few weeks ago. Watching the sunset. I love this time of year.

JAMES:

It's not a bad time. I miss doing this, you know? With you.

JEREMY:

Me too. Hey, James, I'm —

JAMES:

Nah. You don't have to say it. Really, it's cool.

JEREMY:

You don't know what I was going to —

JAMES:

You were going to say, "Hey, James, I'm sorry I was such an asshole all summer and therefore wasted all the valuable time that we could have spent hanging out together." Right?

JEREMY:

I was not an — *(Sighs)*. All right. Yeah. I'm sorry I was such an asshole. And the rest of the stuff.

JAMES:

It's cool. I've been kind of an asshole too. It's going to mess with your whole world, really burst your bubble kiddo, but honestly ... I'm not the perfect paragon of all things good and virtuous that you think I am.

JEREMY:

People don't really say things like that, you know. Outloud.

JAMES:

Since when have we ever been like other people? (*beat*) I'm staying. I'm not going back to Chicago. And I'm not going to L.A. either.

JEREMY:

What? How? What?

JAMES:

Good questions. This is one of those things we probably could've discussed if you had ever actually called me back like you said you would do. Or answered the door when I stopped by.

JEREMY:

God, James, why? Why stay here? There's ... there's nothing here! Literally! This is the middle of nowhere! If we looked at a map right now, that's what it would say!

JAMES:

For you, maybe. This is my home. I love it here. I always have. I told you that. 'Sides, I've lived in Chicago. Didn't agree with me. Why would L.A. be any different? At least here we have seasons.

JEREMY:

I guess I just ... I never thought you'd want to stay. I always thought you'd be the one to get out of here forever. Not me.

JAMES:

Technically, I'll be in Missoula, not here-here. That's, like, gay-Mecca-oasis-liberal-ville. I couldn't ever live here permanently. I'm still a fag, remember? (*pause*) You're freaked out. Is it because I'm not moving or because you are?

JEREMY:

Both. I don't know why so much, but ... this is such a big thing. I've never lived anywhere else before, ever. Only here. Montana is it. I've never left the continental U.S. I've never even been to Canada!

JAMES:

You're not moving to Canada, babe.

JEREMY:

I can't. I can't do this. I can't —

JAMES:

Yeah you can. Sure you can! Why couldn't you?

JEREMY:

Because ... because I'm not ...

JAMES:

Oh Jesus Christ, shut up! Because you're not what? Because you grew up in a small town? Because you're nothing but a small town homo? Screw that! You can do this. You know you can do this. So do it.

JEREMY:

I'm not strong. I'm not like you.

JAMES:

Is that what you think I am?

JEREMY:

I don't know how to fight! You do! You always did! You always did these big things, these big huge earth-shaking things! You came out here, in high school, on purpose! You stood up to all those people, everyday, for years, and you —

JAMES:

No I didn't.

JEREMY:

What?

JAMES:

I didn't always. Stand up. Not always.

JEREMY:

You told me that you ... that no one ever -

JAMES:

Yeah, but I haven't told you everything that ever happened to me. Not everything. There are some things that I just ... *(They look at each other. James sighs.)* All right. I'll tell you.

This is the worst thing that has ever happened to me. The most awful thing. And it happened right here. Remember that.

Gym class. Seventh grade. Remember I told you how I waited to come out 'til after sophomore year, because gym class was over then? This is why I waited. I knew by then. I totally knew, you know, what I was ... who I was. And other people knew it too. Like sniffing wolves or whatever. They just ... knew. And gym class is like ... there's never a teacher, and everyone's naked and brutal, somehow, or they have that potential. That potential for savagery, if that's how they want to be. On this particular day, my gym class was coming into the locker room when the sophomores were leaving. And we had to change. And wear jock straps. And it was, you know, humiliating. I was lumpy in all the wrong places, and glasses, and ... bleech. On top of being an obvious screaming fairy.

And I somehow ended up in this circle of guys. Surrounded. Most of 'em were sophomores. Big guys, way bigger than me. Do you remember Josh Frickinger?

JEREMY:

Yeah. He was a football player, right?

JAMES:

Basketball. Got a scholarship to someplace in the Midwest after graduation. But it was him, mostly, being ringleader guy, and a bunch of his friends. Probably only three or four other guys, but all I can remember is that I couldn't see any way out of them, they had me surrounded, all these guys, in shorts or jockstraps or whatever, and I was almost naked too. I wanted to cover myself, but I didn't ... quite ... dare. Didn't know what to do. No teacher around, of course. And they all seemed like such big guys, like animals.

And that's how it smelled too. I can still smell it, sometimes, in my dreams. Chlorine and bleach from the laundry room where they washed all the towels, and this ... this hot smell underneath it, this animal smell, like a cage in the zoo. A dark smell, wet, like things rotting underneath. Fungus, maybe. It was heavy that day, and I couldn't breathe, and I couldn't gag. I couldn't do anything at all.

They're calling me a faggot, asking me if I'm a faggot, and then Josh gets this nasty look on his face, his big lips just split open in this grin, and all his teeth, and his eyes are squinty and his face is flushed, and he says, "You're a faggot, right? Yeah, sure. You're a faggot. So suck it, faggot. Suck it right now." And he pulls out his dick and he shoves it in my face. I didn't know, you know, what to do. I tried to look away, tried to look up at the ceiling, tried to be a million miles away.

And this is the thing.

I. Um. God. I liked it. Not that I really knew at the time, and really, it was only just a little bit. That humiliation, being that close to this guy, this guy who ... Isn't that awful? A part of me, a part of me somewhere under all that scared, under all that fat little boy with the glasses with his hands in his lap, desperately looking away, desperately ... desperately wanting it at the same time. Josh was popular. Josh was hot. Josh wasn't me. A sweaty, scared, fat little faggot. And he's offering —

He puts his hands in his face.

JEREMY:

James. It's ... hey, you don't have to -

JAMES:

No, I do, see? I haven't ever told anybody this before. Haven't ever. I gotta, Jeremy. I just ... something I have to do.

They're laughing. And I don't know what to do. And they're laughing, and Josh is grinning, and he ... he ... (*Takes a breath.*) And then there's the bell, thank god, the bell, and they have to change, and I ... I have to just go along like nothing ever —

Pause.

He's a teacher now, did you know that?

JEREMY:

Josh Frickinger?

JAMES:

Yeah. Social studies. And P.E. Isn't that like the punchline to a sick joke? That's what kills me. He probably doesn't even remember. It was just a joke, right, a little razzing, giving the little homo some shit. Hey, they didn't hurt me, right? And I wanted it! I must've! Did they see the way I looked at Josh sometimes, do you suppose? Did maybe he notice? Is that why? Is it really all my fault? (*beat*) He never thinks about it. I'll bet. Probably forgot all about it by eighth period that day.

JEREMY:

It's okay. It's all right. It was a long time ago.

JAMES:

I know. I know. I don't think about it very much either, anymore. Pretty not-dramatic ending. I'm sure I went to class, went through all the routines

of gym like I always did. Carried on. Didn't tell anyone; didn't know who to tell. Stuff like that had happened before. I mean, never as bad as that, but it wasn't out of the blue. I suppose that makes it worse. That I was used to it, a little bit. So it wasn't a surprise.

JEREMY:

And you wanna stay here. You wanna stay in a place like this -

JAMES:

Because that isn't all it is, Jeremy. There's so much more to Montana - god, to the world - than any of that bullshit. Because that's all it is. Bullshit. It's kids, and it was a long time ago, and it was horrible, yeah, granted, but it didn't kill me. I got over it. *(beat)* Doesn't mean I'd throw Josh Frickinger a life preserver if he ever fell into the ocean off a boat we were sharing, but still. There's so much beauty here, and peace, and ... Jeremy, look up there. Look up at those stars. Where else in the world do you get a blanket of stars like that? It's like they're alive, and they never change, and they will always be there. It makes me feel better, sometimes. My stars. My Montana stars. They're always there, wherever I am. Wherever I go. There they are.

You're going to be fine. You're going to get along, and you're going to be just fine. I promise you.

JEREMY:

I love you. You know that, right?

JAMES:

You bet I do. You bet. I really do.

James puts his arm around Jeremy. They look up at the sky.

18. Big Sky Country

AMY:

Coming out ... is a continual process that never ends. I hear people talk about "when I came out", and I'm like, "When you came out to who?" Because you're always coming out to people.

JEREMY:

So it's never gonna be over, huh.

AMY:

Probably not. Can you handle that?

He thinks about it. Nods.

JEREMY:

This is the end. I can't believe I'm ... I can't believe I'm — I've grown up here. All my life. Just lived here always.

AMY:

Eh. It's not like you're dead or something. You can always come back someday.

TIM:

I have never really identified as a Montanan, really, because I've never known what that is. You get those Western images in your head; it's the cowboy or whatever, but that's what I thought of as more "Western". I don't know what a Montanan is. I don't know. Is it a Missoulian? A Great Fallsian? A Bozemanian?

KRIS:

It's been a rapid transformation from "Shy High School Kris" to "Pretty Confident In the Public Eye Kris". And I think that Montana ... my experience at the University has helped that. But moreover my friends have helped me with that. They've encouraged me to open up and become more confident in myself.

JULIE:

It was weird going to queer groups in Barnard, which is at Columbia, and it's very liberal, and going to queer groups there, it was ... everyone had already dealt with coming out. Coming out hadn't been an issue at all. People didn't have all these problems with it. It was more like people getting together and watching movies. Coming from Montana, that's just something you have to deal with here.

TYLER:

Growing up in Montana made me realize that I'm not a small-town kind of person. I can't stand it. Even last night, going back to my parents' house in Arlee just to spend the night ... I couldn't make it past eleven o'clock. I was just going out of my mind and I had to get back to Missoula. I get too bored. It's not even ... like, I came back to Missoula and didn't do anything for the rest of the night. It's just the knowledge that, if I wanted to, I could. Whereas in Arlee, it's like, "Well, we could go outside and look at the mountain."

JULIE:

I think that being in Montana people have a sense of who they are, like, a confident sense. It's not like everyone, but people really can stand alone moreso.

KYLE:

I moved here to go to football games. (*laughs*) Winning that 2001 championship played a big role in me coming here.

DEVON:

Since I have lived in other places, I think I'm a lot more open-minded than other Montanans, or people from small towns, 'cause they've been stuck there their entire lives, as opposed to me. I've had a chance to do other things. I feel that if I'd grown up in Shelby my entire life, I'd be a lot more close-minded.

CAMERON:

I would recommend that all my lesbian friends move here. There's hiking and canoeing!

DEVON:

Cameron swears his gaydar is right on. I need to fine tune mine a bit more.

CAMERON:

There were some people who were like, "Oh, you're moving to Montana? You need to be moving to a bigger city." I tried to tell them that Missoula is a good place to be. It's not a big city, but it's a good place to be. It's like ... what are you going to do in Montana? What's there for you?

PAIGE:

My mother called it my great adventure until I was here for about three years.

DAVID:

I grew up in Montana in the '60's and '70's and paid the price for the extreme cultural isolation that is part of Montana's "beauty".

DANI:

I like that I grew up in Montana. I like that people are pretty independent, and they don't like people telling them what to do. That resonates with me as a gay person, even though Montana tends to be a little more conservative than I, personally, am.

ROSS:

My roommate Chris and I ... the other day, we heard someone playing AC/DC in our hall, really blasting it, you know? Just obnoxious. So Chris put on this really really gay remix of "It's Raining Men". And blasted it at about 120 decibels. (*singing*) "It's rainin' men! Hallelujah, it's rainin' men!" You could hear doors slamming up and down the hall.

PAIGE:

I went from drinking Bud Lite to drinking Moose Drool. It's a beer. What Montana provided for me was a way of separating my feelings for my parents and deal with them from afar without any chance of manipulation, and to really establish a new relationship with them. From afar.

BRYCE:

Montana has made me directly aware of how many small differences I have from other people. And it's that much more amplified by the atmosphere here. It makes you aware that you're different and makes you feel, often times, not very good about that.

BROOKE:

My experience growing up in Montana has showed me that people who are from here — especially eastern Montana — or anyone who grew up on a ranch setting ... that it's very hard for them to think about not doing everything themselves because of that self-reliance. This feeling of "we have to be self-reliant, and by god that's what we're gonna be".

SUSAN:

I see myself as more independent, self-sufficient, and private because of the way I grew up. Montanans are all those things, and proud of it. We don't go sticking our noses in other people's business, and I know we are perceived as being somewhat aloof due to that attitude.

BROOKE:

I've been thinking a lot lately about the Montana mentality of ... we're survivors, we take care of ourselves, we do what we want to do, and by god no one's gonna tell us differently. That sort of pioneer spirit.

BRYCE:

I'm really torn right now about whether I would leave Montana. Life would be much easier somewhere else if I went to a nice blue state. There'd be laws to protect me. I wouldn't be judged for who I was. But I can't help but feel that Montana is right on the verge of something really big. Some big change. You know, for the better. I don't know if I want to leave, because I want to help Montana move forward rather than desert a sinking ship.

JEREMY:

I have to go. No way around it.

BROOKE:

There's nothing wrong with that. You take it with you. You always take it with you. You'll always have it, in your pocket maybe, if you ever need it.

JEREMY:

The stars. James' stars. Montana's stars. They're mine too. And I can always just look up and I'll be home.

To the audience.

So this is the end. Um ... thank you for coming tonight. For taking this journey with me, with us, for coming with us on this trip across this enormous state. It's so big, and there's all this space. This beautiful, wild space.

One by one, each actor leaves the stage after the end of their line.

AMY:

I love Montana. I will always consider Montana my home, despite the fact that it's probably harder to be gay here than some other places.

SUSAN:

I will definitely move back to Montana. Because it's my home. I just don't know when.

BROOKE:

We've done a lot of work. We've got a lot more work to do.

DANI:

I think we should put up as big a fight as possible. I don't think we should just lay back and take it. I really like Montana. I like the outdoors feel of it, how everything is wide open. 'Miko feels the same way. We're both like, "We're gonna miss Missoula so much." It's home to us.

DAVID:

It's the Wild West. Home on the range.

TYLER:

I'm going to New York. "Sex In the City" has shown me that it's always a good time.

CAMERON:

I've had an absolute blast. It's more exciting. People are more compatible here.

JULIE:

There's a need for those people who feel alienated, who really don't have anyone, all those people who didn't come out in high school for sure ... they really need some kind of help, especially in Montana. Because it's not here.

KRIS:

Move out of that small town to Missoula or move to a place with a bigger gay community. Places like that offer people a chance to be more comfortable with themselves and sort of get a grasp on what's going on in their lives. I would recommend that no one grow up in a small town.

DEVON:

No more skeletons. No more closets. I want to be in the world.

KYLE:

I have dreams. Just like everyone else. That's what I have.

BRYCE:

We are everywhere. Even in Montana. Even here. I just want you to know that.

TIM:

There's all sorts of different places in Montana, and I do think it's cultivating itself. There's more acceptance, more tolerance ... I just feel that it seems like we're getting a little more — gasp! — diversified, a little less ... cowboy.

PAIGE:

Amelia and I had our ceremony in Mexico almost three years ago, and we had our reception here. And it was so cool to have this total community, not based on sexuality, but mutual understanding and agreement. And they were there to celebrate our union. And most of them were from Montana. It was so cool to have that experience of all these different ages and all these types of people that were celebrating a lesbian commitment. In Montana.

ROSS:

In Montana we have this sense of being out on the open plain, out under the big sky, out where it's still sort of unconquered, I guess. Something has happened everywhere else in the world. Go to Europe, for Chrissakes. Something has happened everywhere. And here, you go out into the woods, and people haven't done much. You might be standing in a spot no one has ever been before.

Jeremy is all alone now. He speaks to the audience.

JEREMY:

So here we are. And this really is the end, you guys. Time for lights out. And then what? And then where? No one here to answer those questions now. Just me.

I don't have the answers. All I know is that this place was my home, for

better or for whatever. We're different here than other places, I've found. You've heard. We're pioneers, we're cowboys, we're independent, we're loners.

Pioneers.

We change the world. Just by living in it. And we do it if we're in Montana or Alabama or Washington, D.C., or Los Angeles or, hell, Siberia if we would ever hold a big gay party there!

Doesn't matter where I go, I guess. I'm gonna continue standing wherever it is. For myself. For my friends. For all those people I've never met, who's stories I'll never hear, but I know them. I know them all by heart.

I am so proud of us. Terrified of the future, a little bit, but proud.

I wondered how I would survive here. Now I wonder how I'll survive anywhere else.

But I can. I know I can.

Because I want to be in the world.

Because I am me.

END OF PLAY

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